

INSIDE OUT

How Corporate America Destroyed Professional Wrestling

by

Ole Anderson

with

Scott Teal

Inside Out

by Ole Anderson, with Scott Teal

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank a few people for their contributions in my life. First of all, I would like to thank my good friend, Verne Gagne. I refer to him often in this book, so I won't say much here. When you read the book, I'm sure you'll understand the tremendous respect and admiration that I have for him. He's quite a guy and I've always thought a lot of him. He's been more than just a credit to the wrestling business.

I also want to thank the man who coached me at the beginning of my amateur career. He has also become a life-long friend. He was a man of principle and commanded respect, so much so that I called him "Mister" Bergstedt until I was in my mid-forties. I eventually summoned up the courage to call him by his first name — Ken. On the other hand, even though I'm in my early sixties, I still refer to Ken's wife as Mrs. Bergstedt.

The other guy who helped me so much was Gene Anderson. I've never known anyone to be as faithful and devoted a friend as Gene was. He was just one hell of a guy. He helped me a lot when I first got started, and showed me little things that other people never thought bout.

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problem. The book is too long."

Little did I know, he was setting me up. I took the bait. "How many pages do we have?"

"768," he replied.

"Damn. What the hell are we gonna do?"

"Let me think about it and I'll call you tomorrow," he said.

I stayed up half the night, worrying about what we would do. He called me early the next morning. "I have it all figured out," he said. "I know how to reduce the number of pages."

"How?" I asked.

"I'll cut out all of your swearing."

Very funny.

"But there's only one problem," he continued.

Once again, I took the bait. "Yeah, what's that?"

"Without the swearing, we're down to 15 pages, and one of those pages is your picture."

Scott could be amusing at times.

Foreword

I had a hard time convincing people that I was actually going to break down and write a book. I got a call from Mike Mooneyham, a writer for the Charleston Post & Courier. "You ought to write a book," he suggested.

"I am writing one," I replied.

"No, I'm serious," he insisted.

I agreed with him. "Well, I'm serious, too."

He still wasn't convinced that I meant it. "No, no. I'm really serious. You should write a book."

"Yeah, I am."

"Oh, you are?"

"Yes. I've been trying to tell you that for ten minutes."

At first, the thought of writing this book made me nervous. I was worried that I was going to be the first to talk openly about pro wrestling, but then my friend Scott Teal asked Lou Thesz to send me a copy of his book, Hooker, so I could see for myself that many of professional wrestling's "secrets" have already been exposed to the public. One of the things that bothered me was the fact that I might betray not only the wrestling business, but people whom I consider to be my friends. I respect them enough that I don't want to screw things up for them. If they were all dead, it wouldn't matter to me at all, but they're not all dead.

This story begins with my motivation to be an amateur wrestler, and later, to be a pro wrestler. If you already know what my real name is, you know something that a lot of people don't. If you don't know my real name — then I'm Ole Anderson. Eventually, you'll run into someone who will say, "Ole Anderson? That's not his real name. His real name is ...." But that's not important. What is important is that I tell my story

in a truthful manner from the standpoint of someone who has been a professional wrestler, a booker, an owner, and a stockholder — someone who did just about everything in the wrestling business. And rest assured — you're going to hear a lot about the "old days" in this book because, in my opinion, a lot can be learned from those who came before us.

Many of you who know me have probably already formed an opinion about me. Whatever you think is what you're going to think. I'm not going to try to change that, but rest assured — I am telling the truth in this book. I might have forgotten a few things. I might have a few dates wrong, or events out of order, but the stories I relate to you actually took place. I'm not saying that I can't get things wrong or make a mistake, but I will not lie about anything.

When I was a kid, it was impressed upon me to tell the truth. That way, you never have to remember a lie. In my opinion, that's nonsense. The problem is that most people can't

even remember what the truth is. If you ask ten different people for the truth, you'll get ten different answers. If you want an example of that, read the eyewitness reports made in late 2002 about the snipers in Washington, D.C. Many people said they spotted the snipers in a white van. The truth is, the snipers were driving a blue 1990 Chevrolet Caprice. The people who called in reports about a white van weren't necessarily lying. They just had their facts screwed up, or reported what they thought was the truth. Well, I might make a mistake, too.

Professional wrestling has changed so much in the past decade. The old-timers and the old-time ways are gone. For instance, consider the fact that I'm writing this book. Twenty years ago, it was something I never would have considered. If Scott Teal had approached me in 1982 and asked me to collaborate on a book, I would have knocked him on his ass for even suggesting it. I still have a little bit of angst about it, but I'm getting over it. But as I've been reminiscing through all of this in my

mind, I realize what a sucker, what an idiot I was, to think that I was going to protect all the wrestlers who just don't care about the future of the wrestling business. The old-timers were worth protecting, but not the overpriced, no-talent, new kids.

When word got out that I was writing a book, the next question on everyone's mind was whether or not I was going to admit that professional wrestling was, or is, fake. First of all, I don't like to use the word fake when discussing the wrestling business. In fact, I probably wouldn't respond to the question, "Was wrestling fake when you were in the business?" I would rather have you ask, "Was the outcome predetermined?" That's a much more descriptive way to ask the question. I also have trouble referring to professional wrestling as a work, the word we use for what some might call pretend wrestling. Work was a term used by people in the wrestling business to describe a match in which the participants perform in the ring. When you work a match, you're not really

engaged in genuine athletic competition. You're pretending to wrestle, or working with your opponent in order to make people believe you're wrestling.

The best way to describe professional wrestling is to call it a wrestling exhibition. I feel more comfortable with that description and I don't mind people talking about it in those terms. Years ago, that's exactly what it was. Today, it shouldn't even be called a wrestling exhibition. The word "wrestling" should be left out of the equation. Just call it an exhibition, or a show. In my day, however, a majority of the wrestling exhibitions were performed by people who could actually wrestle. Occasionally, two wrestlers might get upset with each other, which might result in a shoot. A shoot is a match where wrestlers are in actual competition against one another. It's the exact opposite of a work.

Working, though, wasn't as easy as people seem to think it was. Verne Gagne, the wrestling

promoter in the Midwest, once told me, "What we do as professionals is more difficult to do than simply engaging in a legitimate wrestling contest. If you're working, not only do you have to do something that convinces the people that you actually are wrestling, but you have to entertain those people as well." That was the difficult part of working. Anybody can get into the ring and wrestle, but very few people can pretend to wrestle and entertain the audience at the same time. If you want an example of that, go to a high school where they have real wrestling and notice how few people are in the stands.

At the same time, in my day, we never called wrestling an exhibition. The newspapers did, but we didn't. However, we also didn't want to insult peoples' intelligence. If the question of fixed matches came up, we would acknowledge it. "Yes, there could be people who are throwing their matches." Throwing their matches would be a phrase that I would use. I wouldn't say work or fake or fixed.

One of the questions I now hear quite often is, "Was it all real wrestling?" My answer is usually something along the lines of, "Of course not. Are all people honest?"

"Well, no ...."

"Was your wife a virgin when you married her?"

"Well ...."

"You tell me! If you believe she was, maybe you're gullible enough that I can convince you that all wrestling is real. There's no accounting for what two guys will do in the ring, but for the most part, in professional wrestling, the person who wins gets the most money. I've never been in a position to purposely lose for thirty-five bucks because I have to support my wife, my kids, and myself. Not only that, but if I had lost four times in four weeks on TV, do you think anybody would want to pay to see me wrestle? The fans would be telling the promoter. 'Hey, get rid of that

loser. He's lost four matches in a row. We don't want to see him anymore.' How much sense would that make?"

The people would stand there, shaking their heads up and down. Now, was I really convincing anybody? I don't know. Did I leave them with a little bit of a doubt to where they weren't 100 percent certain? I think I did. When I threw in the occasional shoot, I know I convinced people that my match was real. I never heard the term until a few years ago, but I've read stories where people use a new term for their willingness to go along with what they see in the ring — suspension of disbelief.

People also asked me if wrestlers were friends when they were away from the arenas. I would ask them, "Have you ever wanted to hit or choke your wife or husband?" The answer would probably be, "Well, yeah. I guess so." Then I would say, "Well, I was never married to any of the guys I was in the ring with, and I never went to bed with

them, but there were a lot of times when I wanted to hit them. It you were willing to hit your spouse, I don't think it would be too hard to imagine that I would get mad at some of my opponents."

Professional wrestling has lost a lot of fans during the past ten to twenty years. Some people think cable television had a detrimental effect on the business because it broke down the mystique. I suppose it did to some degree, but you also have to remember that cable really didn't start its massive expansion until the early 1980s. By that time, the business was already heading south. In my opinion, wrestling didn't start to nosedive because of cable television. It was due to a lack of ability by the wrestling talent to perform and entertain, while at the same time, suspending disbelief.

Let's put it this way. Make a list of the wrestlers (and I use that term loosely) who are now working for Vince McMahon, the owner of World Wrestling Entertainment, or what used to be known as the World Wrestling Federation. Let's imagine

that you still had territories and regional television in places like New York, Atlanta, Tampa, San Francisco, and St. Louis, not to mention the 20 or 30 other territories that were running prior to the 1980s. And let's suppose each territory extended no more than 200 miles outside of each city. In your wildest dreams, do you think you could draw a house with anybody that Vince has working for him? I'm not talking about once a year. Could you draw a house week after week? End of conversation.

Vince doesn't run on a weekly or monthly basis — anywhere! He runs the major cities on a sporadic basis. New York, this month. Atlanta, next month. San Francisco, the month after. He still has an opportunity to draw a crowd because wrestling has become a spectacle, not to mention the fact that the wrestling fans have become involved in that spectacle. The fans are more involved than they were years ago. They talk about it on the Internet with people all over the world. For a while, the people were just excited

about bringing a sign to the arena and hoping they might be on TV. It was kind of the in-thing to do. They knew wrestling was bullsh– because Vince told them it was bullsh–. However, at the time, it was kind of the in-bullsh– thing to do. But the bottom line is ... there aren't as many fans following wrestling as there were before Vince's national expansion.

In my opinion, the reason for the decline in business was simply the fact that the guys were getting to be so poor at their craft. They were either lousy movie stars or would-be movie stars, but the greatest director in the world couldn't direct them because they didn't have the talent, or they didn't have the wrestling experience. And the only way you can get that experience is to perform for an audience — week after week after week. I'm 100 percent convinced of that and I haven't talked to anybody who could change my mind. You try this, you try that, and you try something else. After trying a hundred different things, you have to be smart enough to select those

things that do work, and you have to refine those things that do work until they're good enough, hopefully, to draw some money. There's no opportunity to learn those things now because the guys don't wrestle often enough and they don't have enough people with the experience to help them.

Of course, even if they did have the opportunity, they no longer have the motivation. There's no longer any incentive to learn.

Chapter 1
Charles Atlas Wannabe

One question I'm often asked is, "Why did you become a professional wrestler?"

This is going to sound like the old Charles Atlas story. "I turned myself from a 97-pound weakling into the World's Most Perfectly Developed Man." Every word of this story is true, though. I was just a scrawny, little kid when I was growing up in Minnesota. Of all the small guys in the school, I was the skinnieSt. Even the girls my age were heavier than I was. The beginning of every school year was a humiliating time for me. When the school nurse weighed us, she would announce our weight loud enough for everyone to hear. I was so self-conscious about it that I tried to gimmick the scales in the fifth grade. My primary motivation to develop my body, however, came about due to my interaction with two local kids,

Ken and Bill, who were both five years older than me. They had been threatening me on a regular basis.

I had a newspaper route. On one particular morning in November 1952, it was dark and a frigid 20 degrees below zero. That was before they started talking about wind chill. Twenty below was twenty below. I had just turned ten years old in September and I had a new bicycle, but in the Minnesota cold, it barely worked. Every Sunday morning, I would crawl out of bed at 6:30 in the morning to ride my bicycle to the spot where they dropped the newspapers off. I had to pedal more than six miles to deliver a lousy twenty-four Minneapolis Star-Tribune newspapers, for which the subscribers paid 35-cents every two weeks.

When I arrived at the spot where I picked up my newspapers, I was thinking about the two guys who had been harassing me on and off for the last month or so. I really dreaded going out because the two had stopped my bike before, threatening to scatter

my papers and kick the crap out of me. They were older than I was, and bigger than I was. At the time, I was in the fifth grade and weighed only 75 pounds. I thought, Well, here we go.

I got on my bike and made my first delivery, then I pedaled down Rice Street, which took me to South Owasso Boulevard, where Ken and Bill normally were. It was still dark and it usually stayed dark until 7:30 in the morning. As I rode through the snow on my little bike, I could make out two figures up ahead. Sure enough, it was Ken and Bill, waiting for me. They went through their usual routine. They grabbed my handlebars and stopped me. In the past, they had never hit me or abused me physically — they just tried to intimidate me. This time, instead of threatening me like they had been doing for the last two or three weeks, they said they were going to beat the hell out of me. The long and short of it is that Ken and Bill, the local rednecks, motivated me to do something to defend myself.

My grandfather is the one who really started helping me build up my body and my confidence. My grandfather was a tough, old codger. He boxed and did a little wrestling while he was onboard ship during his time in the Merchant Marine. He also knew "Strangler" Ed Lewis, who was one of the greatest heavyweight wrestling champions during the 1920s and 1930s.

My grandparents were originally from Poland. He came into the United States illegally by taking a ship to Canada and jumping ship. He worked his way down through Buffalo before he finally settled in Minnesota. He bought property in Wisconsin before he was 20 years old, borrowed money from a friend to buy his first beer joint, and made a lot of money during the prohibition years. When the depression hit, he lost almost everything he owned. He eventually bought a few houses and another bar on the outskirts of St. Paul, Minnesota. In 1941, the immigration authorities caught up with him and gave him two choices — he could join the Merchant Marine, or he would be

deported to Poland. He was 44 years old when he entered the service. When he was discharged in 1946, he was awarded his U.S. citizenship.

Another person who helped me was Tommy Gibbons. Tommy was the brother of Mike Gibbons, regarded by many as one of the greatest middleweight fighters of all time. Tommy was a legend in his own right. He was a middleweight who started boxing as a professional in 1911. Tommy's biggest claim to fame was a fight near the end of his career when he challenged Jack Dempsey for the World Heavyweight Title in Shelby, Montana on July 4, 1923. Tommy took the fight solely for expense money, while Dempsey was paid $200,000. Tommy proved that he wasn't a slouch. He made Dempsey, who was favored 2-1, look bad during the fight. Tommy ultimately lost by a 15-round decision, but was still on his feet when the match ended. He continued to fight until 1925 when he lost a match in New York to Gene Tunney. Tommy retired and became our sheriff in Ramsey County, Minnesota, the county where we

lived.

Tommy and my grandfather encouraged me to begin exercising. They showed me how to do cable exercises, along with squats, chinups, and pushups. They also bought me my first set of cables and handgrippers. Weights were still taboo at that time, so the springs were a good substitute. When I was a sophomore in high school, I would do 200 to 300 reps at a time with each hand, several times a day, so the handgrippers would wear out after a few months of use.

My dad, who also ran a bar, had a different notion of body and character development. He put me on a training regimen of washing dishes, peeling potatoes, and carrying cases of pop and beer upstairs when the cooler in his bar needed to be restocked. My training also included cleaning toilets and sweeping the floors. He taught me to wait on customers and say, "Yes, sir, can I help you?" My dad thought wrestling was a waste of time, even though my dad himself was a pretty

tough, old guy. He was about 6-foot-2 and weighed close to 235. My dad was the kind of person that you didn't give any lip to — and I never did. He ran a nice, neighborhood bar. If anybody said anything or caused trouble, my dad ended it.

Two old-timers used to frequent my dad's bar — both of them were ex-boxers. The first was an old guy named Sam Masent. The other, who wasn't quite as old, was named Fred Lenhart. Lenhart's claim to fame was that he boxed Tommy Gibbons. Lenhart was a bar owner himself, so my grandfather was well acquainted with several of the fighters.

There were a lot of boxing clubs around St. Paul and Minneapolis in those days. My grandfather took me down to the Lake Owasso Fire Department, which had a primitive boxing program. I don't know if every fire station had a program like that, but I'm sure a lot of them did because the preferred workout in those days was

boxing. There was no organized effort to teach us anything and it wasn't presented as an organized sport. The fire department simply provided bags, equipment, and a place for kids to go workout. If any of the kids had disagreements, the instructors would put boxing gloves on them and make them duke it out in the gym. It was a very effective way of letting kids work out their aggression. Most people could be quick to lose their temper, then lash out and hit somebody, but when plans are made seven days in advance for two guys to put the gloves on, it was a little different situation. Nobody wants to think about getting hit. It's easy to take a hit and immediately retaliate, but it's a lot more difficult to anticipate something that might happen to you, especially when you have time to think about it for a week before it actually takes place.

I think that kind of thing went the way of the buggy whip around 1955 or 1956. There were a lot of parents who didn't think that was the appropriate way to handle things. Fighting wasn't a good

method for doling out punishment and it wasn't proper to encourage it. They didn't want anybody knowingly beating the hell out of somebody else just because they had a beef with them. In the minds of most people, boxing was taking things a little too far.

I boxed for a year or two. I don't remember anybody trying to teach me anything. Someone might have said, "Hey, let me show you this," but regardless, my father and grandfather were very excited about it. They might have taught me a few basics, but all I really remember was that they put me in the ring with a guy who looked five times my size. That's an exaggeration, but when I looked across the mat, he looked like King Kong. He fought as a middleweight, 160 pounds, so he was nearly double my size. He had big traps and arms. If I was up against someone who weighed 160 pounds now, I would laugh, but when I was 12 years old, that was pretty serious.

The kid was Jim Hegerle, the middleweight

champion of St. Paul. Needless to say, he knocked me out. I didn't learn anything from that first experience with the gloves. A week later, they put me in with someone else. He knocked me out, too. Again, I didn't learn anything.

Other than those two incidents, my time spent as a boxer at the Fire Department was relatively uneventful. There were some local and state fighters who trained there. One guy had even fought in the Garden. I think his name was Al Andrews, but I'm not 100 percent certain about that. There were two other guys who were decent fighters, who might have fought on local, semi-pro boxing shows. Other than that, most of them were just local guys with no record. Record or not, most of them were a whole lot better than I was.

I started wrestling as an amateur in the fifth grade. I was just 10 years old and wrestling competition was very limited at that point. Since our high school was made up of six grades, seventh through twelfth, I got to wrestle on the high school

team when I went into the seventh grade — B squad.

In the seventh grade, I only weighed 88 pounds, but I wrestled in the 95-pound weight class. I was still just skin and bones. In the eighth grade, I had beefed up to a massive 119 pounds, and the following year, I wrestled in the 127-pound class. I was getting bigger and stronger. I started putting a little meat on my bones in my sophomore year and wrestled at 165. I became a fair amateur wrestler and played varsity football that year. I was also working out heavily and doing a lot of chinups and pushups. By that time, I thought I was a monster.

I have always had an attitude. When I was in high school, the high school I went to was new. It was state-of-the-art — 1953. The wrestling team had lockers big enough to put a kid in. I know that because we stuffed kids into them occasionally. I also had a street locker, which was located in another part of the building, and a regular gym

locker. We had a nice chin bar that was about 30 feet long, and wall-to-wall mats. It was an impressive wrestling room for 1953. Before high school wrestling matches began, you stood in line and waited for your turn to weigh in. If you wrestled in the 175-pound class, the scale was set for 175 when you stepped up onto it. You were either over that weight, under that weight, or on it. If you were over, you had another hour or so to lose the extra weight. One day, when I was a freshman, I was standing in line. A wrestler from another school was standing in line ahead of me, looking around at the setup we had in the locker room. He couldn't stop talking about how big our lockers were. He was just amazed. I never cracked a smile. I scowled at the guy and said, "Did you come here to wrestle or to bullshit?"

That's just the way I was.

Chapter 2
Greetings from Uncle Sam

I once said I wanted to be big like Andre the Giant. The person I was talking to looked at me and said, "With your attitude, if you had been born big, like Andre the Giant, somebody would have been forced to shoot you by the time you were in kindergarten." I did have an attitude. When I played football, I tried my best to destroy everybody. I have a newspaper article where my high school football coach said he thought I was the toughest kid he ever coached. He said a kid like me only came along once every ten years or so. Of course, when I got into college, I found out that not everybody could be intimidated like the kids were in high school, but that wasn't my intent.

Again, it's just the way I was.

After graduating from high school, I went directly into college. I had taken the ROTC scholarship test between my high school junior and senior year after a man came into my dad's bar and suggested that I take it. I had no idea what it was all about, but if I passed, I would be awarded an ROTC scholarship to any school that had ROTC training. I took the test, but my only reason for doing so was to appease my father.

It was an intelligence test with the standard academic questions, but it also had a section devoted entirely to the military, which I knew absolutely nothing about. I didn't know a Corporal from a First Seaman. I couldn't have scored well on that section, so the only thing that got me through had to be the academic part of it — and I ended up as one of five people who were offered an ROTC scholarship. They told me that I had placed in the top three scores. My guess is that I was second or third. Otherwise, they would have said that I had the top score.

They notified my father that I was eligible to take advantage of the scholarship. They would pay for my college, but in return, I would be obligated to four years of service in the Navy. I decided to turn it down because, at the same time, I was offered football scholarships to several different schools. I received enough scholarship money that I was able to pay all my tuition, room and board, and miscellaneous fees. I took a look at a map and accepted the scholarship from the university that was the farthest away from Minnesota, which happened to be the University of Colorado in Boulder. Over the next four years, I went to three schools — the University of Colorado, the University of Minnesota, and St. Cloud State College.

In August 1964, I returned home to St. Paul during the summer break just before I began my fifth year of college. While I was home, I checked my mailbox and found a brown envelope that contained an official-looking letter. It said something to the effect of, "Greetings from Uncle

Sam." I was in a state of shock. I just stood there, dumbfounded, staring at the draft notice.

I didn't know anything about the Army when I got my draft notice. When I talked to the Army recruiter, I asked him how many months I had to do. I was told twenty-four. "You won't believe how fast twenty-four months go by when you're in the Army," he said. "It'll seem like a couple of months."

I divided that by twelve and came to a brilliant conclusion. "Jeez, that sounds like two years."

He grinned and said, "Exactly."

After we talked about it for a few minutes, he said the best thing I could do was go Regular Army because they could sign me into Special Services, which meant I would be able to play football and wrestle. When I wasn't doing that, I could do whatever I wanted to do. I would also go in as an officer, which meant I would make a little more

money. I liked that idea, except for one thing: It was a four-year deal and I didn't want to be obligated for that length of time. When I declined the offer, he came back like a used car salesman and said, "Okay, we'll make you a great deal. We'll make it three years. That way, you avoid going to Vietnam as a ground pounder." In the fall of 1964, Vietnam was just beginning to gear up. If I took the two-year deal, I would go to Vietnam automatically. The only thing I could think of was the fact that I weighed 240 pounds at the time, and I imagined that I would be eating nothing but fish heads and rice in a terribly hot climate. On the other hand, I didn't like the four-year deal, so I went in Regular Army, obligated for three years. That was the end of amateur wrestling for me. I never went back to school.

They sent me to Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri for Basic Training. During my second eight weeks there, I realized that the recruiter had lied to me. My deal wasn't panning out to be quite what I had been promised. As part of the deal, I was

supposed to play football and wrestle. The athletes were supposed to be exempted from regular duties, but they didn't give me that option. "You might be a big football player, but you're still going to do KP. You're still going to do guard duty. You're still going to ..." It went on and on and on. I didn't want to do all that, so at that point, I dropped out of the sports program and just did the regular Army routine.

Shortly after that, they gave me the opportunity to go to Europe. I had learned how to type, so I did a little negotiating and was placed in an administrative capacity. They shipped me to Fort Dix, New Jersey, and then sent me on to Bremerhaven, Germany, on a troop ship that was built during World War II. I arrived in January 1965 and was stationed there until I left in December 1966.

Chapter 3
“I’ll take the little guy …”

The fact that I was offered an opportunity to get into professional wrestling was more by chance than anything. After returning from a tour of Europe in the early part of 1967, I was assigned to Fifth Army Headquarters in Chicago. While working out at the Irving Park YMCA in Chicago, I met a man named Tiger Malloy. Malloy was a part-time, wanna-be wrestler who wrestled around Chicago and had been on television with the old Fred Kohler promotion. By that time, I weighed around 265 pounds and I was very strong. Malloy suggested I consider making a career in professional wrestling. When I showed an interest, he persuaded me to attend a wrestling show at Chicago’s International Amphitheatre.

If I heard anything about professional wrestling while I was in high school or college, I don't remember it. Of course, I couldn't have told you anything about tennis, golf, or the U.S. swimming team, either, because I didn't follow those sports. I wrestled when I was in high school and college. I also wrestled and played a little football during my time in the service, but I never paid any attention to pro wrestling. I had attended one show two years before, but I didn't pay much attention to the matches. As such, I didn't have any substantive knowledge about professional wrestling at the time.

At that time, Verne Gagne was the promoter in the Midwest. He promoted Omaha, Nebraska, Chicago, Illinois, Winnipeg, Canada, and everything in-between, with his base in Minneapolis, Minnesota. In his younger days, Verne Gagne was an exceptional athlete. As an amateur wrestler, he won the Big Ten title three years in a row and was an alternate on the 1948 Olympic wrestling team. He won the NCAA title

twice, the first time in 1948 in the 191-pound class, and then in 1949 as a heavyweight. Verne also was an All-American football player at the University of Minnesota and was offered a contract with the Green Bay Packers. Instead of accepting the position, he chose to pursue professional wrestling. It was a good choice because he became very successful as a wrestler and a promoter in the Midwest.

A few years ago, I went to the NCAA tournament, which was held at the Target Center Arena in Minnesota. I think it was 1996. At the end of the night, before the finals were held to determine the NCAA champions in each weight division, they introduced wrestlers from the past who were NCAA champions. Eighteen to 20,000 people witnessed the parade of former champions. As each champion was announced, there was polite applause. In some cases, there was very little applause because the people weren't sure who the person being introduced was. Even the die-hard amateur wrestling fans weren't sure who they

were. Finally, toward the very end of the introductions, it was announced "... former NCAA champion, heavyweight, Verne Gagne." The arena erupted in applause. The noise was deafening. I can honestly say I was choked up. In fact, I'm choked up as I write this. I can still see it. Verne came out with one arm held in the air, waving his hand. The ovation from the crowd was tremendous. Those people really showed their love and respect for Verne. I felt just like the crowd. Verne was a man I loved and respected, too.

I didn't know Verne personally in 1967, but I had met him when I was a sophomore in high school. At the request of my high school wrestling coach, who went to college with Verne at the University of Minnesota, Verne had visited our high school twice, the first time when I was a sophomore, and again when I was a senior. I still have a picture of the team that was taken when I was in the tenth grade. I look like a real geek in the photo. I'm standing there like a dork, watching

while Verne demonstrates a chicken wing facelock on one of my teammates. Verne was probably 32 years old at the time. My coach also had pictures of the NCAA wrestling champions on the wrestling board, so I saw pictures of Danny Hodge and Dale Lewis, both of whom had also became pros. That was one of only two encounters I had with anyone connected with professional wrestling until 1967. I had watched it on TV once or twice, but hadn't developed any real interest in it.

The first person Malloy introduced me to at the Amphitheatre was Bob Luce, the wrestling promoter in Chicago, Illinois. Right after that, he introduced me to one of Bob Luce's friends — Dick Afflis, better known as Dick the Bruiser. Of course, Dick acted just like Dick always did. "Dammit, kid. Get your ass down to Indianapolis and I'll make you a star!" Blah-blah-blah.

Of course, Verne Gagne also was there. He took a more subtle approach. "Where are you from?" he

asked.

"Just outside of St. Paul," I replied.

Surprisingly, he didn't remember me from my high school days ... hard to believe. "Stop by and see me at the Dyckman Hotel in Minneapolis," he suggested. The Dyckman Hotel was the site of Verne's wrestling office. Since my coach knew Verne, I decided to take Verne up on his offer. It just made more sense for me to go talk with Verne than it did to go see Bruiser because Verne was based in Minneapolis. I lived right next door in St. Paul, while Bruiser's promotion was based in Indianapolis, almost 600 miles away.

When I walked into the office at the Dyckman, Wally Karbo and Bill Kuusisto were there. Wally was a partner with Verne Gagne in the promotion, while Kuusisto was a former wrestler who helped them run the office. I was home on leave for 30 days, so they scheduled a time for me to wrestle one of the pros so I could show them what I could

do. Verne told me to show up in my sweatsuit. This was in the second half of May and it was hot as hell. Minnesota is either hot or cold. There's nothing in-between. At that time, I weighed somewhere around 265 and I wasn't in the greatest shape.

As instructed, I showed up at WTCN-TV Channel 11 dressed in a sweatshirt, sweat pants, sweat socks and tennis shoes. Channel 11 was in the old Calhoun Beach Hotel in Minneapolis, right off Lake Calhoun, which is where they taped the wrestling matches on Saturdays. There were several wrestlers there when I walked in the door, but Verne was the one who started the tryout. Verne had me do all sorts of things. He began by having me run back and forth in the ring, rebounding off of the ropes. Of course, I had never done that before. When you do it the first time, it's really difficult. It's tough enough to just run in the ring, but hitting the ropes is really a trick. It looks easy, but it isn't.

I did everything Verne asked. He finally asked, "Can you do pushups?"

"Sure." I did pushups. I did squats. He worked my butt off and I was sweating like a pig.

Verne then asked me, "Are you tired yet?"

I didn't hesitate. "Hell, no!" I was smart enough to know that you never admit there's anything wrong. Even if there was, you don't admit it. I learned that lesson as an amateur wrestler. You never let anybody know that you were tired. You just keep on going until you drop.

Ego can make you do a lot of things you don't think you're capable of. I was just about to give out. Just when I thought I couldn't force out one more pushup, Reggie Lisowski walked in. I didn't know much about pro wrestling, but even I had heard of Reggie Lisowski. Better known as the Crusher, he was an absolute legend in the Midwest. When I heard Crusher say, "Hey, look at

that guy's arms," I forced out at least 20 more pushups.

Verne stepped up the pace and had me do more pushups, situps, squats, running, and this and that. I don't know how long he kept me going, but I felt like I was going to die. Verne repeated his earlier question. "Are you tired yet?"

"Hell, no!"

So … we just kept on going.

When he finally called an end to it, I was hardly able to do anything. Now, there are two versions to the next part of the story. Verne tells the story one way. I tell it the right way. The way it was is that Verne said, "Okay, now. Let's see if you can wrestle," and he put someone in the ring to wrestle me.

Verne's version of the story goes like this. After I finished doing all the pushups, chinups, squats and running, he asked me if I wanted to

wrestle. He says that when he told me to look around and pick somebody out, I said, "I'll take that little guy over there."

I didn't know who most of the wrestlers were, but I knew that little guy, Danny Hodge, was a three-time National wrestling champion. As an amateur in both high school and college, I had seen his picture many times.

Danny Hodge was a legend in wrestling, both amateur and professional. During his amateur wrestling career, not only was he unbeaten during his three years of wrestling at the University of Oklahoma, he was never even taken down. In fact, the only match he lost during that time was in the 1956 Olympics. Danny was wrestling the Bulgarian champion and leading in points, 8-1. A controversial pin was called against him and he had to settle for a silver medal. Danny had also made a name for himself in both amateur boxing, winning the Golden Gloves championship in 1959, and professional boxing.

Yes, I knew who Danny Hodge was. I never would have looked over at Danny and said, "Let me have the little guy." Never.

Verne's version is a better story to tell than mine, though, because it makes the story funnier.

Danny Hodge just loved to get in the ring and mix it up. He would wrestle anybody. He looked at me like the big, heavyset mark that I was. We got on the mat and I took the down position. Before I could even think about doing anything, Danny clamped down on me. I thought I was caught in a vise. Danny proceeded to run my face all over that mat until the skin was burned off of my nose, chin, and forehead, not to mention my knees and elbows. In the process, he broke my nose and cracked two of my ribs. Later on, while I was getting ready to go to the hospital, Johnny Valentine told me I was lucky to get off as easy as I did. He said, "If Danny had wanted to, he could have hurt you."

I thought to myself, He could have hurt me? What do you call this? It was true, though. Danny Hodge could have done a whole lot worse. Years later, when I got to know Danny, I realized that he had taken it easy on me. Several months later, Danny told me, "I didn't get too rough with you for two reasons — you didn't give up and you didn't squeal." Every time I see Danny now, he hugs me. He hugs everybody nowadays because everybody seems to be doing that crap.

After Danny finished with me, Verne had me try another wrestler — Dale Lewis. Like Danny, Dale also wrestled for the University of Oklahoma. He was a two-time National champion, winning the title in 1960 and 1961, and he represented the U.S. on the Greco-Roman wrestling team in the 1956 and 1960 Olympics. Dale was good, but he wasn't Danny Hodge. Dale was a genuinely nice guy. So was Danny, but Danny would hurt you.

Verne and the rest of his crew didn't actually say it out loud, but I got the impression that they were

all thinking they would never see me again. I went to the hospital, even though there wasn't much anyone could do for my broken ribs and broken nose.

When my friends heard that I was going to work out at Channel 11, they would say things like, "Your dad says you're gonna go talk to Verne Gagne. I think pro wrestling is pretty much a show." You have to understand that I didn't know anything about anything at this point. I still thought wrestling was competitive. When I went to the TV station, as far as I knew, it was a shoot [real competition]. Of course, the first person I tangled with was Danny Hodge, so why would I go away thinking anything else? Since the second person I wrestled was Dale Lewis, I still thought it was a shoot. And then you had Verne Gagne, someone I considered to be totally legit. Where was I supposed to get the idea that wrestling was fake from that group of people?

As far as my family was concerned, they were all

struck by the fact that I came home from the workout with tape on my nose and several bruises. I remember them saying, "Jeez! I thought professional wrestling was all fake!" Later on, however, when some people tried to convince me that wrestling was all fake, my offhand remark was, "Yeah, it may be, but no one told Hodge or Lewis." I wasn't saying that to protect the integrity of the wrestling business. I still believed it.

Chapter 4
The Shooters

When my 30-day leave was up, I had to return to Chicago to finalize my discharge from the service. With that done, I returned to Minneapolis. I worked out for five or six weeks, and then went back to the Calhoun Beach Hotel on a Saturday, during the time I knew they would be wrestling.

When I walked into the station, it was early, so only a couple of wrestlers were there. Verne was sitting on one edge of the ring. He had his glasses on, like always, and was working on the book. He looked up, down, looked up again, and focused in. He seemed genuinely surprised to see me. "Well, you're back!" When I left the TV station after wrestling Danny Hodge and Dale Lewis, they thought that was it. Goodbye. They didn't give a damn. I was just another guy they

beat up and got rid of. Again, we both remember it a little bit differently, but this is my book, so Verne doesn't have any say about it.

The thing that endeared me to Verne, I think, was when I walked up to him and said something to the effect of, "Maybe I can't beat Danny Hodge or Dale Lewis, but there's somebody here that I can beat. Let's find out who it is." I was exactly the kind of guy that Verne was looking for: somebody who could take a beating and still come back for more.

In 1967, Verne only brought one person into the business. Me. Verne had talked with two guys from the Minnesota Vikings football team — Lance Rentzel, a wide receiver, and Ed White, a big guard who later won a major arm wrestling championship. In my eyes, White really wasn't that big because I was bigger than both of them. Rentzel was a little guy, while White may have been 250 pounds. They were both supposed to workout and train along with me, but for

whatever reason, neither of them showed up. More than likely, they got the word that somebody was waiting down there to kick their butts. Danny Hodge would have loved to have the opportunity.

There were two places to train in Minneapolis: the downtown gym and a farm on the west side of town that Verne owned. I went to the farm to train with Eddie Sharkey. Eddie was a good-looking kid who was an underneath [preliminary] wrestler around the Twin Cities area. Eddie trained wanna-be wrestlers on the farm. The first thing Eddie had me do was run … and then he had me run some more. After that, we worked out and wrestled with guys like Harley Race, Rene Goulet, and Mark Starr, who Verne brought in to put me through the mill. They picked right back up where Hodge and Lewis left off during that first "workout." They beat the hell out of me. Then we began wrestling. The pros called it chain wrestling, which is what we did in both high school and college. You just go through the

moves, go through the moves, go through the moves. That's all. Nobody in high school called that fake and the pros in Minneapolis weren't calling it fake. They didn't call it working, either. They just called it going through the moves.

My training was actually a hybrid of wrestling and working. For example, we would do a lot of amateur wrestling, and then someone would demonstrate a headlock. The headlock is a hold that people just accepted at face-value. Most people don't ever think about the fact that, if you put a headlock on me, all I have to do is pick you up and drop you backwards onto your head. Nobody thinks in those terms. When those old-timers were putting a headlock on me, I never thought about that. When they bring you along slowly like they did, and when it's never, ever assumed that there's anything else but legitimacy to what you're doing, that idea doesn't cross your mind. It's like taking a broad out and working until you eventually get her clothes off. She doesn't even realize what happened.

"How did I get here?"

"I don't know, but now that we're here ...."

Maybe that's not the best example, but those old guys would fool with you like that. You're being led down a path and you don't question it.

One of the things they did that first day was to bodyslam me over and over and over. Your opponent crotches you, picks you up, turns you end for end, and slams you onto the mat. It's amazing how most people just accept things. I don't. When I mentioned how easy it would be for someone to counter the bodyslam, they explained it by saying, "We realize that, but for now, just go with the slam. Eventually, somebody will pick you up, and we want you to know what to do when that happens. At the moment, our goal isn't to teach you how to prevent the slam. We want to show you, in the event that you get caught in a slam position, how to protect yourself when you're being slammed. The secret is very simple. Land

as flat as you can with as many body parts hitting the mat as you can. Don't have your legs sticking out because you'll hit your heels instead of the flat of your feet. You want to have the flat of your feet hit the mat."

In a roundabout way, they were trying to explain how to work, but without coming right out and saying so. And even though you're not completely stupid, you still don't really pick up on the idea. You just accept it. "Yeah, well, I guess that makes sense. I suppose that if I do get caught in that position, I'd want to know how to hit the mat without killing myself." But knowing how to take a slam isn't painless. It still hurts.

Eventually, we got into the holds I used years later when I was wrestling the marks [a derogatory term for someone who believes pro wrestling to be real]. They were a variation of the holds we used in high school, with a little modification added that turned them into devastating, torturous holds. For a person to really comprehend the damage those

holds are capable of doing, you have to give them a hands-on demonstration. What would you do it I put a front facelock on you? If I applied it correctly, you'd be just miserable, and then you'd puke. I don't care what kind of an amateur background you have. That hold is something you dream about in your worst nightmare.

Another good example is a double wristlock. Before I ever got into the business, when I was still in Chicago with the Army, a wrestler by the name of Ralph Bartleman and I worked out at one of the public gymnasiums.

One day, while Ralph and I were rolling around on the mat, two old guys walked up and stood in the doorway. They stood there for a long time, watching us. I later learned that the two men, Ruffy Silverstein and Lou Talaber, had both been professional wrestlers way back in the Dark Ages. In fact, Silverstein also was a former NCAA champion, having won the 1935 championship in the 175-pound weight

class. When Ralph and I finished our workout, they hinted around that they would like to get on the mat with me. I just blew them off. At this point, they were probably 70 years old or more, and only weighed about 180 pounds. I was already up around 265 and close to 40 years younger. All I knew was that I wasn't going to assist two "old farts" on their way to a heart attack.

Finally, after several weeks of watching us, Lou Talaber persuaded me to roll around on the mat with him. He said, "Listen, I'll give you the advantage and let you start on top. I'll get on the mat in the down position."

I said, "Okay, what the hell." I joked with Ralph about it. "I'll give the old man a thrill and throw him around for a little bit."

Talaber dropped down on all fours and I dropped to my knees beside him. The thoughts I had in my mind that day are something I'll never forget. I was thinking about kicking him. I was thinking

about punching him. I was thinking about all kinds of ways I could punish the old man. I remember thinking, He's just a little guy. Not only that, but he's an old guy. He can't do anything. I'll kill him.

We began the match and I broke him down to the mat without too much trouble. He began breathing heavily right away. I got cocky and thought, I'll just fart around with him for a few minutes. Unfortunately, I didn't pay much attention to what he was doing. That was when he slid out from underneath me and grabbed hold of me with that double wristlock. The next thing I knew, my face was being shoved into the mat. I had 180 pounds hanging from the end of my arm. Even as strong as I was, that was tough to counteract. The point being, it took me all of five seconds to suddenly realize that some of those old wrestlers knew things that I didn't know.

I wrestled another of those old-timers after I had been in the business for a month or two. When

Harley Race and I walked into the YMCA in Duluth, Minnesota, there was an old man behind the counter handing out the towels. He wanted to know if he could work out on the mat with us. Harley grinned and said, "Sure, you can wrestle this guy," and pointed at me. A few minutes later, the guy walked in, all decked out in his wrestling gear.

By this time, the YMCA was all abuzz because the news had circulated that two professional wrestlers were in the building and the old man was going to work out with one of them. The next thing we knew, the wrestling room was filling up with people. I didn't know what to do. If I didn't beat the old man right away, I was going to look bad, and if I had to struggle to beat him, I was going to look like a real loser. Heaven forbid if he should give me a run for my money and beat me. How would I ever show my face for the next 50 years?

In the meanest, gruffest voice I could summon up, I growled, "Everybody get the hell out of here!"

As soon as the room had cleared, the guy got down on all fours. I couldn't believe it. He was going to give me top position. I wasn't about to argue with him, so I got down on the mat and began riding him. I didn't punch or kick, but I really worked him over. I thought, This old guy isn't much of anything. When we finally decided to end it, I thought, I guess I just showed that old codger who the boss is.

A few minutes later, I noticed the guy having a long conversation with Harley. I walked over and heard the guy say something about being a professional wrestler in the 1930s. Harley said, "Oh, yeah? Well, the guy you were on the mat with is Rock Rogowski. He just got in the business a month or so ago."

The guy looked over at me, and then turned back to Harley and said, "Yeah, I figured he was new because he seemed to be a little stiff."

The entire time that I had been busting my rear

end, trying to control the guy, making an effort to punish him ... he had been working with me. That gave me a little more respect for some of those old codgers.

Years later, in 1976, I had a discussion with the Great Malenko, a wrestler whose real name was Larry Simon. As a rule, Gene Anderson, my partner, and I always traveled together and we seldom took anyone else with us. We never wasted time talking to anybody before or after our match. When we finished our match, we went straight home. On this afternoon, however, Larry was riding with us. Gene was driving and I was in the passenger seat. Larry, who was sitting in the back seat, began talking about Karl Gotch.

Karl Gotch was known as a master of submission wrestling. His reputation as a shooter, or legitimate wrestler, made him feared by most of the wrestlers in the business. Unfortunately for Karl, his competence as a tough-guy wrestler didn't translate into the professional

world. Wrestling promoters never gave him much of a push, for whatever reason, so when Larry started to talk about him, I said, "Fuck Karl Gotch!"

"What do you mean?" Larry asked.

"How tough can Karl Gotch be?" I sputtered. "Right now, he's on a garbage truck in Hawaii. So who's Karl Gotch?"

Larry calmly asked, "Do you think you could beat Karl Gotch?"

"I don't know," I said, "but how tough can he be? What the hell is there to be worried about?"

A month or two later, we were headed to Greenville, South Carolina. When Gene pulled up, Malenko was in the front seat, which was usually my seat, but I didn't argue about it. I just opened the door and slid into the back. On the far side was a man with short hair. He was sitting at strict attention and was staring straight ahead. I knew

right away that it was Karl Gotch. He was just visiting Larry. "Hello," I said.

Karl didn't turn his head. He turned his whole body from the waist up and said hello to me, and then slowly turned back and looked straight ahead again, with his chin jutting forward. He didn't look like he had two ounces of body fat. He looked lean, maybe 240 pounds. He looked like the stereotypical German officer preparing to gas about 600 people.

I knew what was going on. I immediately realized that Gene and Larry had set it up as a rib on me. A few weeks before that, I had been stabbed and left for dead, so I got kind of flippant and said, "Let me tell you something. If you want to get a piece of my ass, you'd better get a ticket and get in line. On top of that, you'd better pack a lunch."

Karl turned to face me, but it was like he was in slow motion. Once again, his entire upper body

turned in my direction. In a low monotone, he said, "Ven I wrestle you, I vill pack a lunch ... because I vant to take aaall-lll day!"

Well, I never had to pack a lunch. We shot the bull during the rest of the trip to Greenville and had a couple of beers on the way home after the show. I never saw Karl again after that night. I don't know how good Karl Gotch was in regards to the business, but I do remember something he told me. He said, "I wish I hadn't been as good as I was. At the very least, I wish I hadn't let anybody know about it." He felt like his tough-guy reputation kept him from making a lot of money in the business. Whether that's true or not, I don't know. There were a lot of tough guys who thought they were the best workers in the world, who felt like they weren't given an opportunity for one reason or another. The fact of the matter is, as workers, many of them were absolutely incompetent.

There is one thing I do know. I had been in

wrestling for eight years at that point, and having been around some of those old shooters, I realized they could do things to people that I never even thought possible.

Chapter 5
Sports Entertainment

One day in August, Verne finally opened up with me. He called me into his office and said, "Wrestling is a business." He didn't beat around the bush or preface his speech with anything else. Those words came right out of the blue. He continued and said, "What we have to do is much more difficult than just going out and being competitive like we did in high school and college because we have to do things which are beyond wrestling. If pro wrestling was pure wrestling, or what we call a shoot, you could just curl up into a fetal position to avoid getting pinned. You could postpone a defeat all day long by doing that, but who would buy tickets to watch you do it? We have to do things which go beyond wrestling, like a beal, or a backdrop. Those moves are not a part of wrestling in its purest form, but we have to do those moves in such a way that we convince the

audience that they are a part of wrestling."

Verne was right. A pure shoot [real wrestling match] won't draw people. As a rule, shoots are usually boring and over with very quickly, so there's virtually no entertainment value for the audience. There is no appreciation for what goes on, either, because the people don't have any concept of holds that can be put on you that make you scream. The average Joe can't even imagine what that must be like, so it's almost impossible to present shoot wrestling in a fashion that will entertain the fans, or as the boys used to call them, the marks. Amateur wrestling is tough enough. As a result, professional wrestling integrated athletic ability and the show biz idea into an event that was totally different than anything seen before.

If you eliminate competition in the sense of somebody actually trying to beat someone else, then you're in the entertainment business. Someone once made the statement that whenever somebody is getting paid for what

they're doing, they're doing it from an entertainment standpoint. That applies to everything, whether it's hockey, basketball, football, or baseball. It doesn't make any difference. As long as you get paid for it, you're in the area of entertainment.

As a result, you're always trying to improve it, or enhance it, or add to it. If you compare the formations and plays they used in football 30 years ago, you can see how football has evolved over the years. The same thing holds true for basketball. If you watch a basketball game today, there's a huge difference between dribbling now and 30 years ago. Today, the players run 45 steps down the court and make the basket from 20 feet up in the air after pushing off of somebody's shoulders. Just about every sport has evolved into something different from what it once was. In fact, many sports are more accurately portrayed as entertainment based on a sport. Wrestling of course, was in the forefront of that type of thinking.

Verne didn't phrase it all that way, but he never operated under the premise that he thought wrestling was fake. He never operated under the premise that he had to tell you it was fake, either. I had been led along the path for two months, not really knowing anything other than the fact that what I was doing was all legit. The subject of legitimacy never came up. I never asked, "Jeez, do you mean to tell me that wrestling is all legit?" I never said that.

When I first began wrestling, people believed in what we were doing. When I was wrestling in St. Paul one night, my grandfather walked up to ringside. His objective was to thrash Big K — Stan Kowalski. I didn't even know my grandfather was in the arena. I found out later that he had been to one or two shows, but on this occasion, he became incensed about Big K's treatment of me in the ring. Big K told me afterwards, "If he had come into the ring, I would have flattened him."

"If he had come into the ring," I retorted, "I think

you would have had your ass kicked."

I had to talk to my grandfather afterwards. "Grandpa," I explained, "how can I possibly have you help me when I get into trouble? You didn't help me when I was playing football, or when I was wrestling amateur. Sure, now I'm running into people who are a little bit bigger, and a little bit tougher, but you can't come down to the ring just because I'm getting hurt a little bit. You've gotta stay in your seat."

He reluctantly agreed. "Okay, but it's awful tough to watch those guys beat on you."

"I know, but that's what you've gotta do." That was the last time he came n to ringside.

Chapter 6
The Debut

My first match was in Minneapolis. It wasn't scheduled. It came about more by accident than anything. On August 19, 1967, we were all at the television station, getting ready to head over to the Minneapolis Auditorium for the house show. Verne came downstairs, all worked up over the fact that one of the wrestlers, who was driving in from Chicago, wasn't going to be there. "Do you wanna wrestle tonight?" he asked. Oh, Lord! I was so excited. I could hardly wait. The person I was going to work with was in the shower, having just finished his match on television. His name was Jose Quintero.

Quintero was a little guy, about 190 pounds. He was just a job guy — a wrestler whose purpose was to lose his matches in order to build his opponent's reputation. When Jose walked out of

the shower wearing nothing but a towel, Verne called him over. "Hey, come here, Jose. You're going to work with this guy tonight." Verne began talking to himself, trying to think of a finish [move, hold, or event to end a match] that I could use to end my match. I didn't have any idea — primarily because I didn't know what a finish was. "Uh ... Verne. What's a finish?"

"I know," Verne finally said. "We'll do the old Yukon Eric finish. You grab Jose around the waist from behind and lift him up onto your shoulder." It was a backbreaker-type hold that Eric had used when he was wrestling. After he explained the mechanics of the move, Verne wanted me to try it right there in the dressing room. Jose was a little reluctant. "Dammit! Come here!" I said. I was always like that. "Come on, let's try it!" Standing behind and to the side of Jose, I lifted him up so that his lower back was resting on my shoulder. As Jose stared at the ceiling, he was saying, "Oh, be careful, be careful."

Verne said, "Now, jump up and down a little." As instructed, I jumped up and down, and then walked around until Verne said, "Okay, that looks good."

The Calhoun Hotel had big washtubs in the basement where they washed the hotel laundry. On Saturday, that part of the basement became the wrestlers' dressing room. As I was walking around with Jose on my shoulder, I got turned around and lost track of where I was. As I put Jose down, I accidentally dropped him into the tub. As his legs went in, his shin hit the edge of the tub, taking the meat off of his leg from his knee to his ankle. I apologized. "Oh, God. I'm sorry. I'm sorry!" When I grabbed his arms and tried to pull him out of the sink, he began to yell, "Oh, no, no, no! Please don't try to help me!"

When we went out to the ring to work that night, Jose was fighting for his life, hoping he wouldn't get killed. I was the drizzling shits, but I remember Harley Race telling me, "As soon as I met you,

when you first started your training, I knew you were gonna make money in this business." Whether he was just trying to blow smoke up my ass, I have no idea. From that day on, though, Jose Quintero was scared to death of me.

We didn't live too far from Lake Calhoun. A few weeks later, my wife was out on the beach taking sun. She came home and said, "I ran into somebody today that you know."

"Is that right?"

"Yeah, Jose Quintero."

Jose had been walking around Lake Calhoun with another wrestler. They were talking to everybody they met. When Jose met this girl on the beach, he tried to put the make on her. She said to him, "I think you know my husband — Rock Rogowski." The next time I saw Jose, he was just beside himself. "I didn't know it was your

wife." He avoided me after that as much as possible.

My third match was kind of humorous. I was supposed to wrestle Igor Vodik, who was managed at the time by Ivan Kalmikoff. Igor didn't show up, so Steve Stanlee took his place. We were sitting in the dressing room of Bloomington Stadium in St. Paul. I was going to go over [win my match], so Wally Karbo came by and asked, "What are you gonna use for a finish?"

I said, "Jeez, I don't know."

Stanlee was an old-time wrestling veteran who had been retired for several years. He was just wrestling so he could pick up a buck on his way home to Wisconsin. Stanlee said, "Just have him use whatever he's been using."

Wally laughed and said, "This is only the kid's third match."

Stanlee was speechless. For the past 20 minutes,

Stanlee had been telling me about this high spot, that high spot, this finish, that move. I had never sat down with anybody who talked openly about the business to me like that. When Wally told him it was only my third match, Stanlee was dumbfounded.

Then the rib began. George Gadaski kicked it off. George was a nice guy who moved to Minneapolis just before I started. He never left the territory. Verne gave him a full-time job transporting and setting up the ring. He may have taken care of business for Verne in a few towns, but basically, he hauled the ring around, refereed, and picked up a few bucks wrestling on TV and on the opening match at house shows. I don't have any idea what his money deal was. As a rule, if you were in the first match, Verne guaranteed that you would get 25 bucks, no matter what. For example, we made trips to Aberdeen, South Dakota for $25, and it was a 6-hour trip — each way. We bought our gas, a couple of meals, and then got paid 25 bucks. Gas was cheaper then, but

it wasn't that cheap.

George Gadaski sat down beside me and began whispering, "Look at Stanlee. Jeez! He might have been pretty good twenty years ago, but look at him now! He's nothin' but a tubby piece of crap. He doesn't even work regular anymore. Look at you! You weigh 265 pounds and you lift huge amounts of weight. You have a good amateur background. Why in the hell would they even put you in the ring with a guy like that? Go out there and kill the old fart!"

"Okay."

I didn't find this out until later, but George also went to Stanlee and said to him, "Look at that fuckin' kid. Who in the hell is he? He's nothin' but a big, blown-up musclehead. He's only in his third match and they're puttin' him over you? What the hell is this?"

They were playing us against each other, hoping

to instigate a shoot. That's pretty much what happened, only it was rather one-sided. When I went out there, I grabbed a hold. I was really stiff. I picked him up and dropped him with a slam, and he just curled up. Stanlee only wanted to make a couple of bucks and get out of there in one piece. He just wanted the match to end. The match was terrible! Even I knew it was the shits. I finally used the reverse backbreaker to end it.

Amazingly enough, for my first week of wrestling, I was paid $300. I was wildly ecstatic. I had just come out of the Army, where I had been making $140 a month, so I thought the wrestling business was the greatest thing in the world.

Six months into my career, I wrestled Rene Goulet in the Minneapolis Auditorium. We were on the second match of the show. I had a lot of matches that were kind of comical, but on this night, Rene and I had what I thought was a spectacular match. Even Rene thought so. He came over after the match and said, "Hey, that was

great!" When I walked into the dressing room, several of the wrestlers said, "That was one hell of a match!" They thought it was great.

Then Verne Gagne walked up to me. As I prepared myself to bask in his praise, he said, "Don't you ever do that again."

All I could say was, "What did I do wrong?"

Verne explained it to me, although I didn't fully understand it at the time. "Every match is a prelude, or the opening chapters of a book, that lead to a climax at the end. When you're in the first, second, or third match, we don't want you to abuse the referee. We want you to listen to the referee. We don't want you going out of the ring. We don't want you going over the top rope. We don't want you kickin' and punchin' all over the place. You go out and have a wrestling match. Keep it low key. Don't try to do every high spot you ever saw. Don't do every finish that you ever heard of. Just go out there and have a

wrestling match."

Rene Goulet and I had gone out of the ring. We had done everything there was to do. "The only thing you didn't do was get blood," Verne continued. "Now, what do you think the people in the main event can do that will top what you've done? It isn't the fact that they won't do it better, but the people have already seen somebody else do it and screw it all up! They saw what the main event might be doing, only they saw a poor version of it." He concluded by saying, "Never do it again."

Years later, when I got involved in the booking and the promotional end of the business, I always told the wrestlers the same thing. "If you're on the first match, you get out there and wrestle — and that's it. Try to eliminate the punching and kicking. You can throw an occasional punch, and you can kick, but don't do it ad nauseam. Keep the match in the ring and don't go out onto the floor, no matter what." Of course, that last rule was for an

additional reason. I didn't want anybody going out of the ring and possibly having an altercation with the fans. We wanted to build the whole card — the first match, the second match, the third match. The guys in the semi-final got to do a few things, but we saved the majority of the fancy stuff for the blowoff in the main event. To me, that made all the sense in the world, but a lot of the guys couldn't understand that. They wanted to go out into the first match wearing a mask. They wanted to use flames and torches, pull gimmicks out of their tights, bury the referee, and beat up two guys at ringside. "Forget it! You're on the first match. You're on the second match. Keep it in the ring and just wrestle."

They had a lot of talented wrestlers in Minneapolis when I was getting started. At the time, I didn't know who everybody was because I didn't know anything about professional wrestling, but I later realized there was a who's who of professional wrestlers working there — Johnny Valentine, Igor Vodik, Johnny Powers, Stan

Kowalski, Dick the Bruiser, Crusher Lisowski, Larry Hennig, Harley Race, Wilbur Snyder. Verne had assembled a crew of very well-known people, including two guys I did know of — Dale Lewis and Danny Hodge.

Verne also had several former amateur greats working for him. Mad Dog Vachon was a tough amateur wrestler who represented Canada at the 1948 Olympics in London. He finished seventh in the 177 lb. weight class. He also was a Gold medalist in the 1950 British Empire Games. Pat O'Connor, Bob Geigel and Joe Blanchard were all tough, legitimate amateur wrestlers before they turned pro.

There were several great athletes from other sports who were also good wrestlers. They never wrestled in the amateurs, but they came from the ranks of sports like professional football, so they at least had an athletic background. Dick the Bruiser was one of those. He played football for the Green Bay Packers in the early '50s. He didn't

know anything about amateur wrestling, but he was an athlete. Leo Nomellini was an All-American football player for the University of Minnesota and was named to the NFL Hall of Fame for his accomplishments with the San Francisco 49ers. Dick Beyer came into the territory right after I started. Dick was the co-captain of the 1952 Syracuse University Eastern championship football team that played in the 1953 Orange Bowl game. I was there when they seated him in the audience as Dr. X. I did the same thing years later in Georgia with Ernie Holmes, the former Pittsburgh Steeler. We put Ernie in the audience. I did it very much like Verne did with Dick Beyer. That's where I got the idea. The only difference was, Ernie didn't have a mask on like Dick Beyer did.

Then there were people like Harley Race, who was just an all-around tough kid. Harley started his career by, of all things, driving Happy Humphrey around. Humphrey was an overweight wrestler — what you might call a super

heavyweight. He was one of the concessions to the gimmick side of wrestling. There were so many people in the business who were like that, but back then, professional wrestling was made up of a cast of characters who were real characters, as opposed to someone who put on a mask, or a cape, or whatever the gimmick might be. We had characters like Tiny Mills. I don't know anything about Tiny's background, but I do remember that he used to hit hard.

Believe it or not, Verne made me a babyface when I started out. A babyface is the wrestling term for what the fans called a good guy, in contrast to the heel, or bad guy. His reasoning behind making me a babyface was because the heels, for the most part, were regarded as the guys who were running the match. Lou Thesz says something a little different about that in his book. He says it was harder to be a babyface than it was to be a heel. I think that depends on what era you're talking about. During the early part of Lou's career, wrestling wasn't as much of a

performance as it was in the later years. It was more a matter of two people chain wrestling, which is what we did in high school and college. You just wrestle and go through a series of wrestling moves — takedown, escape, breakdown, pin. In my opinion, Dory Funk Jr. and Jack Brisco were the last two pros I knew who could get away with chain wrestling, but even they did occasional high spots. I don't really know what Lou did in the way of high spots. I could see him getting away with wrestling almost entirely, but the rest of us couldn't do that. In fact, if everybody had done that, I don't know if it would have worked so well. Back in the teens and the twenties, when most people thought professional wrestling was a shoot, chain wrestling probably worked pretty well, but when the business was exposed a few times and people began to realize that perhaps it wasn't a shoot, the bottom dropped out.

Chapter 7
On the Road

For the first few weeks, the publicity referred to me as the Brute. I'm assuming it was a combination of Verne, Wally Karbo and Bill Kuusisto who came up with the idea. The trouble was, Dick the Bruiser also was known as the Brute. When Bruiser heard that people were referring to me as the Brute, he didn't like it, so he complained to Verne. The next thing I know, they were billing me as Rock, and telling people that I was the nephew of Bruiser and a cousin of Crusher.

Besides knowing each other and him being my uncle in the business, the long and short of it was, I liked Brute. By the time I really got to know him, though, Bruiser was older. The last time I saw him was in 1990, just a few months before he died. Brute had a vacation home in Florida and

drove up to visit. He looked like he always did. He wore white shoes, light pants, and a Hawaiian shirt.

In his book, Lou Thesz wrote that he thought Bruiser was an arrogant brawler. I never saw that side of Bruiser. I simply saw Bruiser as an off-the-wall kind of guy. He was never arrogant with me, but he would do just about anything. He would take any dare. He just didn't care what people thought. There was a story going around that Bruiser was picked up by the cops for carnal knowledge. He supposedly stood in front of the judge and said, "Your honor, I don't know anything about carnal knowledge. All I know is that she gave me a blowjob." Did Bruiser really say that? I don't know. Is it possible that he said that? Yes. Bruiser could be exactly like that.

Verne and I butted heads for the first time when he approached me about working as a referee and hauling the ring around. I wasn't going to do that. I told him, "No, Verne. I'm not gonna be a

referee. If that's what you want me to do, then I'm out of here. I want to be a worker. I want to be a wrestler. I didn't get into the business to referee, to set up the ring, or to drive the ring truck around. I'm just not gonna do it. If you insist on it, then I'm going to go somewhere else to see if I can get someone else to let me wrestle. If I can't, then I'll just quit."

I did referee two or three matches in August, and on a few other occasions when Verne asked. I didn't mind doing that, but I wasn't going to drive the ring truck or haul the ring. One of the matches I refereed for Verne took place on August 24, 1967, in Duluth, Minnesota. It was a tag team match with Bruiser and Crusher against Larry Hennig and Harley Race. Bruiser stopped dead center in the ring during a flurry of action and began bellowing. Everybody stopped dead in their tracks. Bruiser's dentures — his false teeth — had popped out and landed on the mat. I didn't know what was going on until I noticed Bruiser on his hands and knees, picking up his dentures.

It was tradition that a new guy in the wrestling business started out at the lowest spot on the totem pole. He would earn his stripes by hauling the ring to the towns, setting up the ring in the arena, and refereeing. You might occasionally wrestle in the opening match on the card. It was the equivalent of the guy who was sweeping up shit behind the circus elephant. During that time, Bob Windham and Jim Raschke were both hauling the ring around, and they both got into the business before me. Windham later made a name for himself as Black Jack Mulligan, while Raschke became the hated Baron von Raschke. They had been hauling the ring since they started in the business.

Raschke had been a first-rate amateur wrestler, while Bob was a great, big guy who had been a decent football player. When they saw this young, pudgy kid coming in, they had to be thinking, One of us is going to get relief. One of us will be relieved of this duty of hauling the ring and refereeing. This kid is going to take our place hauling the ring. But I didn't haul the ring. Instead,

in just a few weeks, I was on the upper part of the card, even wrestling main event matches. I always suspected that was why Bob Windham had a grudge against me. I can't verify that without talking to Jack, but I always considered that to be a good reason for his actions.

During the last part of September, Verne sent me to Omaha to wrestle for Joe Dusek. I think Verne owned the Omaha territory, but Joe handled everything for him. At first, I drove down to Omaha for the TV tapings. I would leave Minneapolis at nine o'clock in the morning and arrive in Omaha around nine that night to wrestle at ten o'clock. When it was over at eleven, I would get back into my car and arrive back home around one or two in the afternoon, or whatever time it was. We didn't have the interstates back then. We drove on two-lane roads. Every 15 to 20 miles, those two-lane roads went through a small town and you were held up by several traffic lights. After two weeks, I began to fly down. Braniff Airways had a flight that would

take me there for $35. It cost just about that much to drive, not to mention the time I lost on the road. The only stipulation was that you had to stay over a Saturday to get that special price. In order to take advantage of the special, I would buy one round-trip ticket from Minneapolis to Omaha, with a return to Minneapolis scheduled for the following week. Once I was in Omaha, I would buy a round-trip ticket from Omaha to Minneapolis for that same night, and again, with the return to Omaha scheduled for the following week.

Joe Dusek had Jack Pesek pick me up at the airport. I didn't know Pesek from Adam's housecat. In the course of our conversation during the ride to the arena, he told me, "I only work in the main events." I'm sure he was telling me the absolute truth, but for some reason, Jack was in the opening match that night.

That night, I was scheduled to take the Midwest belt from Bob Orton, so we went to a corner of the dressing room and talked the match over. Before I

continue, I want to explain something. It wasn't too long ago that I said I wasn't ready to start telling people that wrestling is a work, if I ever did. I still have trouble with it, but the one thing I used to say in all truthfulness is that I never rehearsed a match. I usually left it like that. I would tell people, "I can honestly tell you that I never, ever rehearsed a wrestling match."

And, of course, that's exactly what they do today. In fact, I always made it a point to tell people that, Dallas Page being one of those people. I gave Dallas Page a lot of crap, which I did to all the guys. If somebody was doing something incorrectly, I let them know it. One night, I told him, "Dallas, I watched your match tonight. When you wrestle, it's like painting by the numbers." After I let his ego inflate to the point where he was going to bust wide open, I continued. "However, when I wrestled, it was like Van Gogh or Rembrandt. I created something new each time." There were no colors that I had to match to the numbers. I had to think and I had to

create as I went. He never could figure out what I was talking about. Then again, perhaps he did figure it out, but he was either too stupid or too lazy to know how to apply it. Even painting by the numbers, he couldn't stay in the lines and he couldn't figure out what color to use. He was completely incapable of doing anything that he hadn't talked over ad nauseam. He would spend two hours talking about and planning a two-minute match.

There was a time when my tag team partner and I had several angles going on at the same time, so we were flying back and forth to different towns. There were times when we arrived so late that the promoter would send some broads out to pick us up and drive us to the arena. At times, we already had our ring gear on. If we didn't, we changed in the car. As we walked into the building, the promoter or booker would shout at us, "Get your ass in the ring!" We didn't know a thing about what we were supposed to do in our match until the referee walked over and said, "You guys

are goin' over."

I know this is off the subject, but do you see how writing your own book is like booking a show? I can put myself over when I want. I could have written, "The referee walked over and said, 'You guys have gotta do the job [lose the match] tonight!'" Of course, everyone knows my comeback to that would have been, "Screw you!"

My point is, there were many times when there was no discussion of the finish. There was no discussion of high spots. So I can always say, "We never, ever rehearsed a wrestling match," and leave it at that.

The same thing applied to our interviews. We never had anyone give us a scripted piece or tell us what to say. We ad-libbed the whole thing. Sure, somebody might come over before our interview and say, "Hey, don't forget this," or "You're gonna be in this town," but basically, that was it. We used to do a hundred or more interviews in one

afternoon, and all we were given were the names of the towns and the names of our opponents. "Okay, on this next interview, you'll be talking about your match in Spartanburg with George and Sandy Scott." As soon as we wrapped that interview up, they would say, "You'll be wrestling Mr. Wrestling and Sam Steamboat in Richmond with a 'No Disqualification' stipulation." That's all they gave us — the place and our opponent. The idea of someone coaching us or rehearsing our interviews was something we never considered. The wrestlers back then were professionals. They were good enough on the mike to talk on the fly, without being given a complicated script of nonsense.

I couldn't point to anyone as being the "best" when it came to doing interviews. Everybody had something special that they brought to the table. Thunderbolt Patterson, Johnny Walker, and Wahoo McDaniel were just super on the mike. Jimmy Valiant was great. Verne was excellent, and Verne just talked in a normal,

conversational tone of voice. By contrast, the interviews today are laced with too much profanity, which was something we never did. In fact, we never thought about it. Everybody knew we weren't supposed to swear on interviews. We didn't kick our opponent in the balls, either. That was simple enough to remember. We didn't have to be told or reminded of that. We just didn't have to do those things to get our heat.

Back to Omaha. The finish of the match called for me to throw a punch at Orton and accidentally hit the referee, Ernie Dusek, so we had to practice, but it wasn't a rehearsal. The bottom line was, at that point, I didn't have any experience throwing punches. Jack Pesek was standing there, listening to us and muttering, "Dammit, what's happening to the business? The first match has to go 30 minutes broadway because they don't know how long the main event can go." Going broadway is wrestling jargon which means wrestling to a draw or tie, with neither man being declared the winner.

Before I went to Omaha, Verne gave me instructions to talk like the Crusher at all times. That's what I did. Whenever I talked, I always used that low, throaty growl that Crusher used. A month or so after I began working in Omaha, Joe Dusek picked me up at the airport. I had a cold, so I talked more normal than I ever had before. Joe looked at me and said, "What's the matter with you?"

"Oh, I've got this damn cold."

"No, I mean your voice."

"Oh. I'm hoarse."

"What I mean is that you're always talking like the Bruiser and the Crusher."

I talked like that everywhere, inside the ring and out. "Yeah, Verne told me to," I explained.

He threw his hands up in the air and cried, "Oh, hell! That's a waste of time. Those guys never got

over down here."

I worked on top in Omaha for three weeks in a row with Tex McKenzie. Oh, they were horrible matches! We had a Loser Leave Town stipulation for our last match. Our dressing room was set up about 20 feet from the ring, which was where Joe Dusek did the interviews, so I could hear Joe interviewing Tex.

"Tex," he said, "you have a tough match coming up with this young boy. The loser has to leave town!"

"You know, Joe," Tex answered, "It is gonna be a tough match, but I've really enjoyed my stay here. I've had a lot of good times."

I was listening to Tex on the monitor in another room. When I heard that, I went nuts. I was talking to myself. I had only been in the business for two months, but even I could see that Tex was telegraphing the finish. Jeez, he's telling

everybody that he's leaving! What the hell is he thinking?

When Joe tried to cover it up and correct him, Tex said, "We've had some good times, haven't we? Remember when we used to go huntin'? Boy, we've had some good fun. I'm sure gonna miss this place." Joe had no choice but to go along with him.

By the time it was all over, there wasn't anybody there who didn't know that Tex was leaving. It's like the old stories I used to hear about "Loser Leave Town" matches. The wrestlers would pull up to the arena with a U-Haul trailer hitched to their car. I never saw anybody do that, but I heard it wasn't all that uncommon. And here's Tex, "I've really enjoyed my time here. It's been a pleasure workin' for you, Joe."

I didn't see Tex again until 30 years later at a Cauliflower Alley Club meeting in Las Vegas. He looked good. He was such a different person that I

didn't even recognize him. He looked so distinguished, like a businessman. When he had his wrestling tights on, though, he looked and acted as dumb as a stump.

I stayed with Verne until the summer of 1968. I owe a lot to Verne for giving me such a big push. He treated me really well and took care of me when I was getting started. I went right from breaking into the business to a push on top. Verne put me on top in Omaha and gave me the Midwest title, the area's top singles belt. Verne was the world champion during that time. He booked us together in Omaha and we did a double disqualification. I was still as green as grass, but Verne worked hard and made me look good. I also was working close to the top in Chicago and Minneapolis with Bill Watts as my partner ... or to be correct, Bill Watts had me as his partner. So I got main event money, which was just fantastic. I wasn't doing any jobs, either ... except when I was Bill Watts' partner. Bill sure wasn't going to get beat.

To some degree, I think a lot of the guys resented me because of that. They thought I was a prima donna. I had only been in the business for two months when all that happened and it was unusual to give someone a push that big so early in their career. When Verne asked me to haul the ring around and I refused, the guys all thought I had a bad attitude. Of course, they were absolutely correct in those assessments because the top was exactly where I thought I should be.

No, Verne didn't treat me like he would the average rookie, but then, I wouldn't have allowed it any other way. I would have left.

Chapter 8
The Stampede

I realized I would have a hard time working for Verne on a regular basis, so I never did, other than during my initial run when I first started. There were things about Verne's personality that made me think he was very much like me, or if you want to get technical, I was very much like him. We were both very hands-on and we both cut straight to the chase. Verne told you what he wanted. If you didn't like it, you could hit the door and go work for someone else. That being the case, it was inevitable that, sooner or later, our personalities would have clashed.

When I first began working, it was easy to work for Verne because we didn't have that much contact. I wasn't around him much because he sent me down to Omaha. Even when I was in Chicago, Minneapolis, or Winnipeg, he wasn't around

much. I would get the details of my matches from Bill Watts, or from Wally Karbo, or Bill Kuusisto, or even the referee, George Gadaski. I just never had much contact with Verne, but I heard a lot of stories that made me realize I wouldn't be happy working for him, but since I was just starting out, things were just fine. Under those circumstances, I got along with Verne, but I wasn't so sure I would be able to continue getting along with him when I was in a position where I had ideas about things I wanted to do, which may or may not have been ideas about things he wanted to do. I could see we would eventually have problems working together.

That being said, I also have all the respect in the world for Verne Gagne. I liked Verne very much, and still do to this day. I really do. I just thought it might be difficult to work for him. The bottom line is that Verne told you what he wanted, and that's what he expected to get.

In April 1968, Verne gave me the option to work in Dallas for Fritz von Erich or in Calgary for Stu

Hart. Wally Karbo made my decision a little easier when he told me, "You'd probably make a little more money with Stu Hart." Stu had offered me a guarantee of $300 a week. Fritz didn't offer me any guarantee, so that was all the incentive I needed. "I'll go to Calgary."

On the average, Verne broke one guy into the business each year. A few that come to mind are Gene Anderson, Dale Lewis, Bob Windham, and Jim Raschke. Before I left for Calgary, Verne talked about a contract. He offered me $350 a week and a 50/50 split of any money above that. I'm sure he thought I had potential as a talent that he would be able to use in a way that would make money for both of us. Verne liked pros to have an amateur background. As I stated earlier, since I had an amateur background, I fit the bill. I weighed 265-plus pounds and looked good. I wasn't a chubby. I looked good. At the time, I had a 55-inch chest and a 40-inch waist. I also was quite strong. I'm sure he thought he could do something with a guy like that.

However, I didn't want to obligate myself to a contract. Harley and some other guys advised me against it. "You'll make money in this business," they encouraged. "You don't need to give half of your money to Verne." I realized I had to bypass Verne, so I left for Calgary at the end of April 1968.

I was in Calgary for less than a month, but it seemed like two years. I hated Calgary. I absolutely hated the place. I was riding in Gil Hayes' compact Oldsmobile with Archie Gouldie, Ox Baker, and Waldo von Erich. I weighed 275 pounds. I don't know how big Ox Baker was, but he was more than six feet tall and weighed at least 300 pounds. Archie and Waldo each weighed 255 to 260 pounds. Can you imagine cramming five wrestlers into a car, with nobody weighing less than 250 pounds, and traveling over a thousand miles? On one trip, we replaced Archie with Art Thomas. Art was 6-foot-4 and 250. I only made a few trips with those guys, but it seemed like it was a thousand. Every week, when we left Edmonton

after the matches, we stopped at a store to get beer, salami, bologna, pickles, mustard, ketchup, cheese, mayonnaise, and two or three loaves of bread. By the time we arrived in Saskatoon, around five o'clock in the morning, everybody was covered in beer, salami, bologna, pickles, mustard, ketchup, cheese, mayonnaise, and two or three loaves of bread.

Saskatoon was absolutely the worst place I had ever been in my whole life. The hotel we checked into had only one bathroom, and that was at the end of the hall. The name of Stu Hart's promotion was Stampede Promotions, but the only stampede I saw while I was there was in the morning when everyone was trying to get into the bathroom.

Stu asked Waldo von Erich and me to come over to his house one afternoon to workout in his basement. He had a big house on a hill. Stu and Helen had twelve kids. Two of the kids, Owen and Bret, used to squirt us with squirt guns. The kids' clothes were stacked three feet high on the

dining room table. The basement and the yard were so full of trash and junk that you could find a part for a 1922 Model T if you took the time to look around.

Stu had a guest house behind the main house that he rented to a girl. Stu bragged about the girl, who was an artist, painter, sculptor, or whatever. "This girl is a genius. I want you to take a look at her work." He continued to boast about her accomplishments as we walked into the house. As we stepped inside, I noticed a terrible smell. "Stu, do you smell that?"

Stu didn't even register. He just kept on talking. "What a ... ecchh ... wonderful girl and, uh ..."

"Stu! Do you smell that?"

Waldo noticed it as soon as he stepped in behind us. "Jeez, Stu! What the hell is that stink?"

Stu didn't miss a beat. He just kept on. "Oh, she

did this sculpture ... uh, so talented."

We walked around a corner and saw a toilet that had overflowed. There was crap all over the floor. It was just terrible. I shouted, "Stu!"

Stu goes, "She's a wonderful ... ecch, ehh ... dammit! That fucking cunt!" In the space of a heartbeat, she went from "the most wonderful girl in the world" to "that fucking cunt!" Yes, Stu was quite a character.

He still is. I was going to call Stu after his son Owen died, so I called Verne to get his number. Verne said he had already called Stu to offer his condolences. Verne said, "Stu, this is Verne Gagne."

"Verne! Do you remember that match we had in Winnipeg in 1949? We really had the crowd going."

"Well, Stu," Verne continued, "I'm sorry about

your son."

"Yeah ... ecchh ... we had the people going."

"When will the funeral be held?" Verne asked.

"Boy, that Winnipeg was really ... ecchh ... a hot town."

Apparently, they were leaving for the funeral at that very moment. Verne could hear the family in the background, "Come on, Stu! Get off the phone. We've gotta go." Stu kept rolling right along, reminding Verne about the match they had in 1949.

One night in Edmonton, Stu did a blade job, but when he came back to the dressing room, he was oblivious to the fact that he was bleeding. He had blood all over his suit coat. I said, "Stu, why don't you take the coat off and we'll run it under the shower. The cold water might get that blood out." He didn't pay any attention. He just kept walking around, blood dripping all over the

place. When I saw him 30 minutes later, the blood had dried and caked up. Later that night, as he stepped onto the plane, people began screaming. "What the hell's the matter with those people?" Stu muttered. "Haven't they ever seen a wrestler before?"

Stu came into the shower after my match one night. Wally had already warned me. "Watch yourself while you're up there. Stu will try to put you in a hold and make you fight your way out." Sure enough, Stu walked in while I was in the shower. He had a nice suit on, but he just walked right in. He was outside the range of the shower spray, but he was still getting splattered. He put his hand on my shoulder and said, "Ecchh ... you have pretty big shoulders." He was leading up to the point where he offers to demonstrate a hold. I began moving around so I could leave the shower. Pretty soon, Stu was underneath the shower! He was getting drenched, while I was standing outside the range of the spray. When he finally realized it, he began

cursing. "Ah, ga-dammit sunabitch." He walked out after me, but by that time, he was dripping wet.

When I gave Stu my notice, he tried to get me to stay. He even showed me pay slips. Archie Gouldie and Waldo von Erich were making more than $1,000 a week, but I just had to get out of there. Stu called me a few times that summer while I was in the Carolinas. "If you come up here, we'll make you the champion." I couldn't even dream of going back to that rathole. Years later, I saw Stu in Las Vegas. He put his fingertips together and said, "Rock, we were building a little nest around you, but you flew away," and then he fluttered his hands in the air. There was only one Stu.

Chapter 9
Minnesota Wrecking Crew

After leaving Calgary, I wasn't sure what to do next, so I went back to Minneapolis. I never told Verne I had finished up in Calgary. He thought I was on vacation. While I was home in Minneapolis, I got a call from Lars Anderson, whose real name was Larry Heiniemi. Lars and Gene Anderson were the original Minnesota Wrecking Crew.

I don't know what chain of events brought Gene and Lars together, but they were both from Minnesota and they were trained by Verne. I knew Lars because we both went to St. Cloud State College, which was college number three for me. I was trying to make a world tour of colleges and universities. Lars was a 240-pound jock who

played football and wrestled. I was out of football and was busy concentrating on getting a business degree, with a minor in partying, drinking, and women. In my spare time, I joined a fraternity and became an ex-jock frat-rat.

In the spring of my junior year, the fraternity wanted to raise some money. Greek Week was approaching. That's the week in spring when the fraternities and sororities at colleges and universities all over the country go nuts and act like they don't belong in higher education. Because of my amateur background, or in spite of it, it was decided that I would challenge anyone and everyone to an arm wrestling contest. When an opponent was found, the fraternity would charge a dollar to everyone who wanted to watch the contest. The jocks became the prime target. Wrestlers, baseball players, hockey players, and especially the football players. It was just a matter of time before I would cross paths with Lars.

I trained with weights and springs to strengthen my arm and shoulder muscles. We would go into beer joints in town and challenge everybody. I would drink a beer with one hand and arm wrestle with the other, trying to act nonchalant about it. There weren't too many people who were that good. I was quite strong. I was still a young, 200-pound, 20-year-old kid, so it was fairly easy for me to win. If there was someone who presented more of a challenge, then I worked a little bit harder, but I never lost a match. Lars tells people that someone from the football team beat me, but that's not true. Nobody did, and I arm wrestled several of the athletes. I never arm wrestled Lars, but after Greek Week, the jocks decided to promote Lars as their top contender, so an amateur wrestling match between us was scheduled in the college auditorium. The person who refereed was Gary Smith. He was the 191-pound NAIA champion. The match between Lars and me was more of a brawl than a wrestling match, and we went off the mat several times. At the end of the match, I was declared the winner.

Lars became a good friend. I liked him when we were in college, or at least after we had our wrestling match. He was a good amateur. In 1965, he placed fifth in the NAIA National Collegiate tournament at 177 pounds. As a professional, I think he had a lot of potential. A lot of people thought he could be world champion without a lot of problem, but Lars had his dark side. His personality was a little different and the way he operated was a little unusual. He could be shady, too. He pulled a couple of sneaky deals with Gene when he borrowed some money, but Gene never said much about it. I liked Lars, but I wouldn't give him a nickel.

Lars was in the Guinness Book of World Records in the late '70s. He was listed as the Highest Paid Professional Wrestler. What a crock! I threw my copy away and swore I would never read the book again. If the Guinness people didn't check their facts any better than that, their book wasn't worth reading.

I brought Lars into Georgia in 1977. He had fantastic talent as a professional and he had a million-dollar face. We got sideways when we wrestled each other and he didn't want to do the job. We couldn't agree what to do, but we went out to the ring, anyway. Early in the match, he picked up a chair and brought it into the ring. At the time, I didn't know whether he was working or shooting. I'm still not sure what he planned to do with the chair, but I stopped him and took the chair away, and then pounded the hell out of him with it. No, that's too strong a statement. I gave Lars two really good licks with the chair. When I went back to the dressing room, I fully expected him to come over to continue our shoot in the dressing room, but we didn't have a problem. Lars just stuck his hand out and said, "Great match." That was the end of that.

Now I want to go back to 1964 and my introduction to professional wrestling. At the time, I was stationed at Fort Leonard Wood for basic training. In basic training, every day felt like a

month. Tired, miserable, and sometimes even horny ... although not often. After the first eight weeks, we graduated, only to begin our next eight weeks of what was called AIT — Advanced Infantry Training. In our third week of AIT, some guys invited me to go with them to a big event that was taking place on post. Considering all the excitement I was having (marching and eating C rations out of a can), I agreed to go with them. When we arrived at the building where the big event was being held, the big event had already started — a professional wrestling match. As we walked in, we saw a big guy walking down the aisle. Just then, a woman stood up and hit him with her shoe. He took the shoe away from her, ripped the heel off, and threw the shoe high into the air over the heads of the crowd. As he turned to walk away, she proceeded to take the other shoe off and smack him in the back of the head with it. Once again, he turned around, took that shoe away, ripped the heel off, and threw it into the crowd. He turned around, jumped up onto the ring apron, and climbed into the ring.

The lady at ringside turned out to be the wife of a Colonel at the base, but she had made an ass out of herself. In those days, if someone yelled at a wrestler, the wrestler could walk out into the crowd and punch the person in the face, and nobody gave it a thought. In a few years, that all changed, but we'll get to that later.

Now about the guy who took the shoe. He was bigger, maybe 255 or 260, but I could still recognize him. It was Gene Anderson. I originally met Gene in high school because our schools competed in football and wrestling. Gene was a big kid for high school, about 240 pounds. He was a talented football player and heavyweight wrestler. Gene graduated high school in 1959 and I never expected to see him again, but Gene Anderson, the other half of the Minnesota Wrecking Crew and Lars' tag team partner, would become my tag team partner from 1968 until 1981.

Back to my call from Lars. He told me, "I'm in the Carolinas wrestling with Gene

Anderson. We're wrestling as the Anderson brothers, the Minnesota Wrecking Crew. Why don't you come down and join us as the third Anderson brother." In mid-June 1968, I drove down and we began wrestling as the three Anderson brothers. I liked the idea of wrestling as an Anderson, but when I asked, "What's my first name?", Lars suggested Ole. I thought it was a rib, so I just laughed it off. I didn't know they really meant it until I got into the ring and the ring announcer introduced me.

"In this corner ... from Minnesota ... at 270 pounds — Ole Anderson!"

I realized then that it wasn't a rib, but I thought, What's the difference? From that day on, I've been known as Ole Anderson.

Gene put me over like a million bucks. He was a super guy. I learned more about the business from Gene Anderson than I did from anybody else. I also learned a great deal of psychology from

Gene. Gene was the mechanic in the ring. He knew everything about how and when to do certain things when it came to operating in the ring. He knew when to get a hold and how to run spots.

Gene had a funny way of explaining things. He wasn't the type of person who would sit down and explain things verbally. He taught by example. He would do something in the ring so you could see how it worked — or why it didn't. If you did something in the ring that didn't work, he would come over and say, "You can't do that."

"Why, Gene?"

"Well ... uh."

Gene used very few words. He just wasn't a talker. He never felt comfortable talking on television. That was why Gene was happy to be teamed up with Lars. Lars, who was a natural when it came to talking, did all the interviews for the team. Later on, when Gene and I teamed up, I

did all the talking. He always told the promoters, "I don't need to talk. I bring the best talker with me."

While on trips in the car, Gene and I worked on finishes and angles incessantly. I always had ideas, so Gene became a sounding board for me. I would think an idea through, and then I would throw the idea at him. He never volunteered much, but he could pick my ideas apart. "Yeah, well ... that doesn't sound too hot." I would go back to the drawing board. After a year or two, I thought I knew all there was to know. At that point, I had a lot in common with Lex Luger, a musclehead who thought he knew everything. The difference between Lex Luger and me is that I did know something. Lex never did learn anything. And he never will.

You have to remember. When I started, it was a lot easier to learn because you worked every day. Not only that, but I was around all those wrestlers who had years of experience. I named

several of them earlier, but I could go on and on and on. You couldn't help but learn a little something from everyone. Eventually, if you paid attention, you got an idea about how to work in the ring. When I hooked up with Gene in the Carolinas, ideas took shape, and began to mean something, because we were working together day after day after day.

Gene tried to alert me to different aspects of the business. He made me understand that I had to listen to the crowd reaction when I was in the ring. There were all kinds of little things you had to do — things that most of the guys never even thought about. I used to develop a new high spot or a new move once every few days, or once a week. I would keep working on it and working on it and working on it. I would try a move in a different part of the match, try to do it in a little different way, lead into it from a different angle — just to see what the reaction of the people would be. Gene was the critic. That was the way you learned back then.

I always considered Gene to be a friend, and I'm sure he felt the same about me, but we didn't necessarily socialize with each other. We didn't socialize with the other wrestlers, either. I don't think his family was ever at my house and I don't believe I was ever at his house. In many cases, we were together 24 hours a day for several days of the week, and we were together to some extent at least six days a week. Later on, we were together seven days a week. It was almost like being married ... but without sex.

Wait a minute. That was like being married.

Well, anyway ... when we finished wrestling for the night, we went our separate ways.

Gene never showed much emotion. He was very quiet about everything and wouldn't say much of anything. We were in the car one day, driving to a town on a long trip. Gene was driving, I was in the passenger seat, and Lars was in the back. Lars had a can of Pepsi in his hand and was leaning

over the front seat. All of a sudden, a car changed lanes and pulled over in front of us. Gene touched the brakes lightly to slow us down, but it was enough to throw Lars forward a little. Lars overplayed it and spilled some of his Pepsi down Gene's neck. Gene didn't flinch. He simply grumbled, "Don't do that again, Lars," and then we continued on our way.

A few minutes later, Gene tapped the brake pedal again. Lars shifted forward and dumped some more Pepsi down Gene's neck. Gene didn't say anything. He just kept on driving, but he casually bent down and reached underneath the driver's seat, where he kept one of those old, plastic ice scrapers. He yanked the ice scraper out and whipped it backwards. Whap! He smacked Lars right in the middle of the forehead with the blunt end of it. Gene casually put the ice scraper back under the seat. Just as casually, Lars sat back in the seat with his can of Pepsi and rubbed his bleeding forehead. That was the end of that.

On occasion, Gene had a nasty streak, and I used to get on Gene's nerves now and then. If I wasn't criticizing him or fussing at him, I was simply being an asshole. Come to think of it, I used to criticize everybody, so it didn't take people long to get mad at me. I was just being me ... an asshole. One night, when we were in the basement of the Asheville Auditorium, Gene was really steaming about something I did in the ring. Of course, as usual, I argued. Gene always carried a letter opener with him, but it was more like a knife. It had a little bit of an edge to it and a sharp point. When he reached his boiling point, he reached into his bag and pulled out the letter opener. When he did that, I thought, Uh-oh.

Gene just glared at me and began to walk in my direction. I began to back up, trying to stay about ten feet away from him. There was a stack of old school desks in the basement, so I picked one up and held it in front of me like a shield. Gene didn't stop. He just kept walking. Angelo Martinelli, a referee and office stooge for the promotion, and a

few other guys had followed us downstairs to see what would happen. They had walked over to Gene and were trying to get him settled down. "Come on, Gene! Take it easy." Gene didn't pay the first bit of attention to them.

Martinelli said, "You guys are making a lot of money together. You've got to get over this." I thought they had Gene under control, so I put the desk down between us, turned around, and began walking away. As I did, I heard a bang. The next thing I heard was a loud groan. When I turned around, Gene was massaging his fist. He was so mad that he had punched a firebox that was mounted on one of the cement pillars. He had hit the box so hard that his knuckles began to swell up. The second and third knuckles looked nasty. I walked back towards Gene. When I was about five feet away, I stopped and said, "And let that be a lesson to you from now on." He roared like a bull elephant and made a lunge at me with the letter opener. I didn't waste any time. I got out of there. We didn't ride home together that night. In

fact, it was a few days later before we finally patched things up.

Lars stayed with us through the fall of 1968. He wanted to go back to Minnesota and be Larry Heiniemi again. In fact, during the months we were all together in the Carolinas, Lars constantly talked about wanting to go back home. I wasn't sure where I was going to go. I didn't have any idea. I thought Gene and I would split up and go our separate ways. A wrestler named Paul DeMarco began talking to me about forming a tag team, but before I made a decision, Gene said, "I'd just as soon stay together with you as my tag partner. I'll go wherever you want to go."

Gene was happy to have me because he had somebody who could work a little bit and who could talk. As I said, the one thing I could do well was talk. Gene didn't want to say anything to anybody. I also was the kind of guy who would go to the office, even in my first year in the business, and tell the promoters what I thought. I didn't

hesitate to tell them what I thought about their lousy payoffs, or that we would go to another territory if they couldn't do any better. My favorite phrase was, "If you can find somebody to replace us who can do the same things Gene and I can do, then go get them, because we're out of here." The promoter's response was usually, "Well, wait. Wait! Wait just a minute."

Gene never entered into the conversations with the promoters. When I shared my plans with Gene, regardless of what they were, his standard response was always, "Whatever you wanna do."

I would warn him. "Gene, we might lose our job."

"Whatever you wanna do." That's all he ever said.

As fate would have it, we didn't have to go anywhere. I thought our time was limited and we would have to find a place to go after a few

months, so we were making plans to leave when Jim Crockett, the promoter of the Charlotte territory, called us into his office. This was the old man, as opposed to Jimmy Crockett, his son. I worked for Jimmy years later after the old man died. Gene and I both thought the old man was going to give us our notice, but he floored us both when he said, "I'd like to have you guys stay here. You can stay as long as you want." That was unusual in itself because Jim Crockett's territory had the reputation of being a place where you could only stay for a couple of months. For that matter, every territory was like that. The promoters moved talent in and out. With the exception of a few people who were there forever, like Johnny Weaver and George Becker, nobody stayed in Charlotte very long. The guys would leave and come back in, but they never stayed for a long time. Old man Crockett used to tell everyone, "You can buy a house here, but make sure it has wheels underneath it."

Gene and I thought we were looked upon very

favorably by Jim Crockett. I believe Gene and I were two of the few people he actually told, "You two can stay here as long as you want." He really wanted us to stay there, so we stayed. That carte blanche was wiped out when Mr. Crockett died. Even if he had lived, the only reason I would have stayed there was, number one, if I made money, and number two, if he had let me have some say in our programs.

Chapter 10
Japan

In January 1970, Gene and I went to Japan. Since we had a layover in Honolulu on our way to Japan, Jim Barnett called and asked us to work out a time that we could all meet in Honolulu. Barnett was the promoter in Australia and he wanted to talk to us about wrestling for him there. He offered us $800 a week apiece. When I told him we wanted a thousand each, he said, "Oh, I'm not prepared to pay that much." I started to give Barnett a variation of my favorite phrase, but he interrupted and said, "Maybe some other time." So that was the end of that. We went on to Japan and Barnett flew back to Australia.

We weren't known at all in Japan. I had only been in the business for two years and a few months, so we were just starting to make a name for ourselves as a team in the United States. We

weren't known at all overseas.

One night, we wrestled an old Japanese man. We literally beat him senseless. We threw him into the fence that surrounded the ring and hit him with everything we could lay our hands on. He loved it. The Japanese wrestlers never complained. It was like when I first started in the business. The guys working on top were all stiff. Working with them was like dancing with a 250-pound block of cement. They just pounded the hell out of me. The thing about it was, I liked that, because it meant that the people watching would be thinking, Holy balls! I thought wrestling was all fake. So now it becomes a debatable point. Why would I be getting beat so badly if it's a work? It might give them reason to think, If it's all fake, how much sense does it make for them to be pounding on each other like that?

Dale Lewis also was on the Japan tour. I was really mean to him. I ragged him about one thing or another the whole time we were over

there. Dale enjoyed going to the movies, so he began asking me to go with him. I didn't want to, but he kept insisting. He didn't let up until I finally agreed to go. "Okay, okay, but since you want me to go so badly, you pay for the cab and the movie."

When we got to the theater, he stopped by the concession stand to buy some popcorn and a drink, so I went in and found a seat. By the time Dale came in, the theater was pitch dark. As I watched him walk in and look around, I slouched down in my seat so he wouldn't see me. He finally sat down by himself and watched the movie. When the movie was over, we met outside on the sidewalk. He was really mad at me. He said, "If I had wanted to go to the movie by myself, I would have gone to the movie by myself!"

On the last day of that same tour, Bobo Brazil wanted me to go out drinking with him. I turned him down. "Nah. I don't drink."

Bobo persisted. "Come on! Have a drink with

me." He kept bugging me until I finally gave in. I started out with the intention of drinking just one beer. In Japan, the beer came in big 16-ounce bottles. When I finished the bottle, Bobo filled two water glasses with Sake. Just to be a smart-ass, I tipped my glass up and drank the entire glassful. Then I had another one, and another one, and another one. According to my partner Gene Anderson, Bobo and I drank three bottles of whiskey in about 40 minutes! I was totally smashed. I had never done that before. I drank a little in my first years of college, but after that, I didn't indulge in alcohol very often. By that time, though, I was married, older, and perhaps a little bit wiser. On this particular night, I put all that aside and really laid one on.

In my stupor, I decided I was going to find Dale and stretch him. Stretching is a term used to describe what we did when we wanted to inflict real pain on someone. That's what Danny Hodge did to me during my tryout in Minnesota. You get your opponent in a legitimate submission hold that

stretches his ligaments and tendons.

When someone answered my knock on the hotel room door, I barged in and lunged at the person standing there. I never came close to touching him and almost fell on my ass in the attempt. When I made another effort to grab him, he easily sidestepped me. All of a sudden, I realized it wasn't Dale standing there. It was Lou Klein, one of the old-time wrestlers who was legitimately tough. I had picked the wrong room.

I don't remember how far down the hallway Dale's room was, but it was several doors down and across the hall. I pounded on his door until he finally answered. "Yeah, who is it?"

"It's me, you stupid son-of-a-bitch!," I growled. "I'm going to come in there and kick your ass." When Dale opened the door, he was standing there in his pajamas. I never wore pajamas. In fact, I had never seen anybody over the age of ten ever wear pajamas.

Before I could even think about stretching Dale, I puked all over him. If he hadn't grabbed me, I would have fallen to the floor on my face. Nice guy that he was, Dale dragged me into the bathroom and eased me down into the tub. I was really out of it, so he took my clothes off, cleaned me up, and put me on the couch.

The next morning, we were flying back to the States, so we got onto the bus that would take us to the airport. They put me in the front seat with Joe Higuchi, who was the lead referee for the All-Japan promotion. He gave me something that was supposed to settle my stomach and clear my head. It didn't do any good. I must have spilled my guts out of the bus window 20 times during that trip. When we arrived at the airport, the entire side of the bus was covered in whatever I had eaten the day before. I'm sure the wrestling fans must have enjoyed seeing someone puking out the window of a bus that had "All Japan Wrestling" printed on the side. The only person still alive who would remember this story is Scandor

Akbar. The rest of the American wrestlers on that tour have all died during the past few years.

Before we got off the bus, Dale said, "You know, I should have stretched you when I had the chance."

I was in no shape to argue. I just mumbled, "Yeah, you should have."

Chapter 11
Working a Shoot

When I broke into professional wrestling, wrestling was considered to be an exhibition, with an occasional shoot. Did a shoot happen often? No. Did it happen? Yes. Was professional wrestling more of an exhibition than anything else? Yes. An exhibition was the best way to describe professional wrestling. The only thing different from what's going on today is that, back then, most of the guys who were worth anything were legitimate wrestlers. However, we still had some people with no legitimate wrestling background.

In my opinion, there are three types of pro wrestlers — legitimate wrestlers who could beat you or lose to you in a shoot, performers who could win or lose, and legitimate wrestlers and some performers who could win or lose, but could

also hurt you in a shoot.

Bob Roop, a former AAU champion, could beat a lot of people. Dale Lewis, a National champion, could beat a lot of people. But both of them hated to hurt anyone. If they had a choice, they would choose not to hurt you.

Harley Race, for the most part, was a performer who knew just enough to hurt you — and would — especially when working out with marks.

Gene Anderson — same thing.

Bill Watts was good enough to beat a lot of people, and I doubt that he would have a problem hurting someone if he thought someone needed to be taught a lesson.

Lou Thesz could — and I suspect, probably would.

Verne Gagne could hurt you, but I don't know if he would — maybe if the guy was a real asshole.

I just had a thought. If being a real asshole is the criteria for getting beat up, I'm pretty lucky.

Danny Hodge — I don't even want to think about what he would do. He is so strong that just thinking about hooking up with Danny is painful. I was there once. I'm not volunteering again.

When Gene and I wrestled, we had a lot of people buffaloed, both in the ring and out of the ring. The fans, as well as a lot of the boys, weren't quite sure how tough anybody really was. You couldn't even be certain about the guys who were supposed to have a reputation for being tough. I'm not talking about people like Danny Hodge or Verne. I think they would have taken on a freight train, and for that matter, Lou probably would have done that, too. But everybody else has that little bit of uncertainty at times. At times, even the reputed tough guys turn out to be just like the rest of us. If you act like you're a bad ass, sometimes you can get away with it.

I brought Ernie Holmes into Georgia and suggested he use the premise that, although he didn't have an extensive wrestling background, he was still one tough dude. Having competed in one of the toughest sports in the world, NFL football, and being a member of the Pittsburgh Steelers' Steel Curtain, he was sure he could give the wrestlers some competition. He liked the idea and he went along with it.

The only thing we had Ernie do for his first appearance was sit with the television audience. Gordon Solie, our color commentator, might have said something like, "That guy looks familiar," but that was about it. On the following week, however, Gordon took it further. "I'm positive that it's Ernie Holmes, the defensive tackle for Pittsburgh. If someone can get him over here, I'd like to talk with him." One week later, we had Ernie do a brief interview with Gordon. "I don't have any wrestling background to speak of, but I've done a few things in my time that make me believe I'm a tough SOB. The NFL and the

Pittsburgh Steelers ain't no picnic. I think I can handle a wrestler and I'd like an opportunity to try."

I brought Ernie to the Omni on the following Friday night and put him in the audience again. This time, he was acknowledged by the announcers. He got up, introduced himself, and did a little promo. In the first match, we worked a deal where he was watching the heel abuse his opponent, while the referee unsuccessfully tried to keep order. Ernie finally stood up and got the heel's attention. When talking wasn't enough, Ernie went into the ring and kicked ass. The bad guy ran and the people cheered.

As things developed, though, he was showing up at the matches — let's just say, not in the best condition or mental frame of mind to perform. After being there for only three or four weeks, he missed a shot, so I fired him at the TV studio. Ernie had a reputation of being a tough guy. When I fired him, he began mumbling about

doing something to me, so I began looking around for a 2x4, or a piece of pipe, that I could use in case he went out of control. I couldn't find anything, so I just got in his face, and I said to him, "If you're gonna do something, do it. Otherwise, I have a lot of work to do. No matter what you decide to do, you're still fired." After we stood there for a few seconds, he said something like, "Yeah, but if I do anything, you'll blackball me." When he said that, I knew he was just like most people. No matter how tough a person is, they always have that little bit of doubt about the other guy, especially if the other guy looks like he might be able to handle himself. They're not quite sure just how tough the other guy really is.

I'm sure that wouldn't have worked with Danny Hodge, Verne, or Lou Thesz, because they were good enough and tough enough to beat just about anybody. The toughest people I ever knew were the ones who just didn't care. They didn't care about themselves, and they didn't care about you. I felt like Dick Murdoch and Harley Race were like

that. They just didn't give a shit. They didn't care about themselves. They didn't care about anybody else. They didn't care if they got arrested. And that made people like them dangerous.

When I thought professional wrestling was a shoot, I knew I couldn't beat Danny Hodge, but that's when I said to Verne, "There's somebody here that I can beat. Let's find out who it is." The possibility of getting beat wasn't new to me. The idea that somebody was tougher than me wasn't new to me. It was simply that I thought I would learn and somehow I would get better than I was. I didn't know where it was going to take me. Was I ever going to be able to beat Lou Thesz? I didn't think in those terms. I just knew there was room for me somewhere.

Thinking in terms of a shoot and legitimacy, though, I would say I equaled any of those people. Again, I don't want anyone to misread what I'm trying to say. I'm putting myself at a different level. Lou Thesz is at the top of the

ladder. I'm not going to argue about that. Danny Hodge is at the top of the ladder. I'm not arguing about that. Verne's at the top of the ladder, and Dick Hutton, and all those guys. Maybe I'm not even on the first rung of that ladder, but I did what they did. I had to shoot, but they were shoots at a lower level. There's no arguing that, but at that level, I did everything I could to protect the integrity of professional wrestling.

I know I didn't stretch people as well as Lou did, and I know the competition wasn't of the same caliber. I'll never try to convince anyone that I could have stretched anyone of Verne, Lou or Danny's stature. When Lou was stretching people, they were people of substance who had the ability to hold their own and to hurt people if they so desired. Luckily, I didn't run into anybody like that. Most of the shoots I had were shoots with marks off of the street, some of whom might have been able to wrestle a little bit. They were brief shoots with guys who really didn't know what they were doing. I'm sure some of them were better

than me, but they were too scared to perform the way they should have.

The first shooting I ever did was in 1964, just before I joined the Army, when I wrestled in a carnival, taking on all-comers at the Minnesota State Fair. On the carny circuit, that attraction was called an AT show, which was short for "athletic show." Gene Anderson wrestled on the AT show, too. I only did that a few times, but we would stand on a stage, or bally, and taunt the marks. The objective was to make someone mad enough that they would come into the tent and wrestle you. If you wanted to see a shoot, that was exactly what we were doing.

Whenever I stepped into the ring with one of the challengers on the AT show, I never knew anything about them. They might be athletes, or they might be local bullies. For all I knew, they might be good. What most people don't realize — and here we are going back to what Verne said about working being more difficult than actually shooting

— we were shooting and working at the same time, if that makes any sense. In other words, you couldn't just go into the tent and destroy the challengers. If you did that, the people who bought tickets to watch weren't going to come back. The whole idea was to make it look like it was a close contest and convince the people that the challenger has a chance to beat you. So you work with the challenger, even though he doesn't realize it. The guy is really fighting hard, thinking he has a chance to beat you. Meanwhile, you're working and trying to make him look halfway decent. That was difficult because he could bite your nose off, poke you in the eye, or kick you in the balls. When you think the match has gone on long enough, you pin the guy and make him think he had a chance. You make it close. He crawls out of the ring and his buddies slap him on the back. "Hey, you almost beat him!" And maybe he decides to try it again. If he does, it means more money, because more people will return to watch.

When the day was over and you had wrestled

three or four times, the owner of the carnival might give you three or four dollars. There were times when we got ten or fifteen, but there were other times when we only got a beer. There we were, taking our life in our own hands in a shoot, and the owner hands us a six-pack of beer to split between two or three of us. You learned what fighting was all about, but what a price to have to pay for the education.

The shortest shoot I had with a legitimate shooter was with Jack Brisco. That one really backfired on me. I grabbed a hold and we went to the mat. I whispered in his ear, "Okay, tough guy. Let's see what you can do." Well, Jack just swung his elbow back and it landed with a smack on the bridge of my nose. I said, "That's good enough for me. I'm done." I found out all I needed to know. My nose was bleeding and my teeth could go next. How many more of those shots did I want to take, just for the hell of it, so I could tell people that I had been shooting with the guy who was national champion in 1965. I didn't need that. We

just laughed about it. "Okay, that's good enough for me. Would you care to work?"

Verne Gagne, who was a great amateur wrestler, told me that Lou Thesz wanted to shoot a little bit one night. I asked Verne, "What happened?"

"We went about a minute or so," he replied, "then Lou decided we'd work."

There are people who would ask, "Are you trying to say that Lou couldn't handle Verne?" I don't know. I do not know. Even with all the old hookers and shooters, there is so much baloney out there. It's so difficult to separate the truth from the fiction. Even the guys who were legitimately tough are always prone to tell a story that might be just a little bit better than it really was. If Danny Hodge told me any story, I would tend to believe it because I had already been stretched by him. I know Danny can punch and I know he can wrestle, so what's left? However, when you get into most of those old shooting stories, it's hard to say

what's true and what's not.

It's like the stories about Stu Hart. Stu Hart started every match by putting something on you. He would say, "Ecchh ... ecchh, you bastard ... ecchh. See if you can ecchh ... get out." I found it odd that Lou never mentioned Stu Hart in his book. Lou did mention Luther Lindsay, who I knew very well. In fact, I was there the night Luther died in the ring. Luther was a tough little wrestler who used to talk highly about Stu.

In his book, Hooker, Lou told the story about a shoot between Joe Pazandak, a tough shooter from California, and Johnny Valentine. Pazandak was a good amateur who was sent to California to hurt Valentine. In Lou's version of the story, Johnny stood in the corner of the ring and didn't come out. When Pazandak finally came over to where he stood, Johnny punched him in one eye, punched him in the other eye, and then proceeded to beat the hell out of him. If my memory serves me, I would pretty much be willing to swear that Johnny didn't

tell me anything like that. Johnny told me he barreled out across the ring and caught Pazandak off guard. If someone wants to tell it another way, they're welcome to do it. In fact, Lou told it in a way that made it a better story than the way Johnny told it — which bolsters my memory of the story. If Johnny was going to embellish the story and make himself look better, he would have said, "Yeah, I just stood there until Pazandak came over. I punched him in one eye, punched him in the other eye, then proceeded to beat the hell out of him." Instead, Johnny said, "I was scared because I knew that he was a shooter, so I went after him before he could get out of his corner."

From my very first professional match, I liked to work really tight, and I never changed my attitude when it came to working. A lot of the pros had that outlook in those days. In fact, some of them really took advantage of me in the days right after I started. Big K, for instance, would just pound the hell out of me. I was too dumb to know any better, so I let him put bootlaces on my chest with his stiff

kicks. I wasn't aware that he was taking advantage of my naivety until Verne made a comment to him when we were in Omaha. Verne said something to the effect that, "If you keep that up, you'll find yourself out of work." Verne didn't give a damn about the fact that Big K was pounding the hell out of me. What bothered Verne was that Big K was taking the whole match — and pounding the hell out of me. It wasn't until later that I realized that Big K wasn't a guy like Maurice Vachon, who could really wrestle. Big K was just Big K. If I had lit into him and began dishing it right back, he would have been in a world of hurt because he wouldn't have known what to do. On the flip side, if I had lit into Maurice, I would have found myself tied up into so many knots that I would still be untying myself.

Once I was smartened up and realized what was going on in the pros, I tried to make my match look believable every time I got in the ring. I made it look like a shoot. No, I take that back. I didn't make it look like a shoot because every match was

a shoot to me. I used to shoot in every match. Well, almost ....

First of all, I didn't know how to work. When I first started, a lot of the guys didn't want to work with me because I was so clumsy. Back then, I was clumsy and hurt people, but at least nobody could say, "Rock didn't make it look real."

Iron Mike DiBiase had been a tough amateur and was a salty guy. He was typical of the heavyweights back then. They were pudgy and didn't look like much, but they were as tough as nails. Mike also was the father of Ted DiBiase, who had a lot of success as the "Million Dollar Man" in the World Wrestling Federation. I almost poked Mike's eye out one night. I was concerned because I thought Mike's eye might have suffered serious damage. It was bleeding like crazy. After taking a look at it, Ernie Dusek, the referee, wanted to stop the match. Mike grabbed me and pushed me into the corner. "What does it look like?" he asked.

"It doesn't look good, Mike," I replied. "What do you want to do?"

He said, "Well, let's just keep on going." We kept on working and finished the match. It turned out that his eye was all right. Stories like that began to circulate, so some of the guys tried to stay just as far away from me as they could. They knew I had the reputation of being a crowbar — a wrestler who puts the pressure on and hits harder than most other wrestlers do. At the time, I didn't even know the word, but I was a real crowbar, or cemento. I worked really stiff.

As I've said, the first guy I wrestled when I was getting into the business was Danny Hodge. Jeez! That's why I resented anybody who tried to get into the business just because they loved wrestling. "I've always been a fan of wrestling. I'd like to be a wrestler." Some wrestlers would tell guys off the street, "Okay. It's all fake, anyway. It's just a show. Come on down tomorrow and we'll teach you a couple of holds."

After the guy got into the business, if someone on the street walked up to him and said, "Wrestling is fake," he would say, "Yeah, it's all fake."

But if you go to Danny Hodge today and say, "Hey, Danny. All that stuff you were doin' was fake," Danny would take it upon himself to demonstrate that fake stuff on your body. Trust me — you don't want to go there.

I felt the same way. I didn't think I could beat everybody, but I told people that I could beat everybody and I made people think I could beat everybody. Consequently, they believed it. I even had a lot of wrestlers who were in the business convinced that I was shooting. I can't tell you how many of them would say, "Hey, loosen up!"

I always had the conviction that my matches should be as close to a shoot as they could possibly be. I didn't want anybody to look at one of my matches and say, "That's a bunch of crap." Gene reinforced that when I began teaming

with him. When Gene and I were in the ring, that was our objective — to make our match be as close to a shoot as we could make it. We were doing what you might call a working shoot. Gene used to tell guys we were working with, "We want to make it look like a shoot, and we are gonna shoot, except we're not gonna hurt anybody. We'll work with you, but we're gonna keep it so tight that everybody will think it's a shoot." We would throw punches or use holds that were legitimate holds. We wouldn't hurt anybody with a hold, but we were stiff. That was our policy. A guy couldn't sit back, smoke a cigarette, or drink a beer while he was working with us. A lot of people we wrestled may not have said, "Those guys are shooting," but you can bet the farm that they said, "Those Andersons are so damn stiff. We'd rather not work with them." That was the reason a lot of guys didn't like to work with me when I first started. Maybe later, too ....

We were in the ring with two guys in Anderson, South Carolina. One of them had just come into the

territory. He was a 225-pound musclebound guy. I talked to his partner before the match and said, "Hey, listen. We're gonna be really stiff with you tonight. We're really gonna get after you."

Gene and I used to double team our opponents. They would try to get to their corner to tag their partner, but we would block them. "We're gonna keep you in the ring," I continued. "When I give you the word, I want you to try to get to your partner. You shoot to get to him. We'll shoot to hang onto you. I want you to understand that you're gonna have to work your ass off to get to the corner. Just fight! Gene and I will keep tabs on you, so you won't get anywhere unless we want you to. I want you to fight like a mad dog, so there's no doubt in anybody's mind that you really are fighting, trying to get out of the ring. In fact, we want your partner to believe that you're fighting to get out. When you finally get to the corner, make the tag, but stay in the ring. Just sit down in the corner and mutter out loud, 'Fuck those Andersons.'"

I forget who the guy was, but as soon as the match began, Gene ran over and began to beat the hell out of him. We were really rough with him. We fought him like hell. After Gene and I took turns pounding on the guy for several minutes, I whispered to him, "Okay, it's time for you to get to your corner." When I gave him the signal, I loosened up and he took off. He tagged his partner, collapsed against the ring post, and shouted, "Fuck those Andersons!"

The crowd roared. They just knew his partner was going to pulverize the Andersons. For that matter, Gene and I both expected him to come into the ring with guns blazing. His signature move was to jump over the top rope and hit you with a dropkick, so I ran toward the ropes where the guy would be coming in. Instead of leaping over the ropes, he just held onto the top rope and squatted down real low — still standing outside the ropes on the ring apron, scared silly. I reached over the ropes and grabbed hold of him, trying to pull him in. That was tough, but I actually pulled him over

the top rope. He held onto the rope the whole time. He never let go. When the referee finally broke his grip on the rope, I slammed him onto the mat. He immediately went into the civil rights position, curled up like a fetus. The people in the audience, who had been primed for his big comeback, deflated like a balloon with a hole in its side. I kicked him a few times, covered him, and that was it — one-two-three. He left the territory that night.

If you were working light, you wouldn't have a bruise on your body, so the people would say, "Jeez! They get hit so hard, but there's no marks." When I hit a guy, I wanted to make sure there was an impression of my hand on his chest. Nelson Royal was a good example of someone who liked to get hit. Nelson could take whatever Gene and I dished out. We would slap the hell out of his shoulder, his chest, or whatever body part we were working on. We used to slap Nelson so hard that he would bleed — and we weren't using any blades. He would have blood blisters all over

his chest. And Nellie loved it. He just loved it! Wahoo McDaniel was similar in that regard. After taking that kind of punishment from us for a while, Wahoo would dish it right back. He would slap the hell out of us. Oh, they were stingers. Most of the wrestlers, though, didn't care for that at all. In fact, some of them would actually run the other way when we came toward them in the ring.

Gene and I wrestled Nelson and Les Thatcher at an outdoor show in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. Gene and I started the match by beating on Nelson. Nelson would sit on the mat, while one of us would stand behind him, holding him in an armbar. We would bring our hand down and slap him across the chest, right around the pec muscle. It didn't take much of that before blood blisters were breaking out on his chest.

The whole idea was to build the suspense until Nelson finally made his way to the corner to tag out. While we were blasting away at Nelson, Les

was walking back and forth on the ring apron. He looked scared to death. He must have been thinking that when Nelson finally got loose, Gene and I would give him the same treatment. Les finally leaned over the ropes and said, "I don't know about you guys, but I'm just here to work." Our plan, and Nelson was in on it, was to get Les all riled up and nervous — and it worked to perfection. Well, it worked until Les dropped off the ring apron onto the ground. If Nelson had broken away from us at that point, there wouldn't have been anyone in his corner for him to tag. Les didn't want to take that tag from Nelson for anything. He didn't want Nelson to get near him. Les probably won't remember it as I do, but I remember it vividly.

That's the way it was in every match that I had for a long time. I used to get so excited when I first got into the business. Like I said, I treated the business like a shoot. I was always a crowbar, but that was especially so when I went to Omaha. Everybody else was working — but not

me. Oh, no! Not me. I was shooting like an Olympic wrestler and blowing myself up every time I got into the ring. If I hit you, you knew it. Of course, part of the problem back then was that I didn't have enough experience to know where my punches were going. I didn't know where my kicks were going. I just let loose.

When I was wrestling in Omaha, I had six-man tag team matches with Reggie Parks and Doug Gilbert as my partners. That was when I was still wrestling as a babyface. The heels were Bob Orton, Mike DiBiase and Jim Starr. When the heels had Doug Gilbert in trouble and he made his attempt to tag out, they would steer him right over to Reggie. If Doug put his hand out to tag me, our opponents would pull it down and move him so he had to tag Reggie. They didn't want me in the ring for anything. Nobody wanted to get close to me.

Years later, when I was in the Charlotte territory, they brought Reggie Parks in. One night, Gene and I worked against Reggie and somebody else. Gene

started the match and got Reggie into a situation where Reggie was selling [to show feeling or emotion in order to emphasize the action your opponent is doing to you] in the ring, and then tagged me in. When I came in, I jumped on Reggie. I had him in a rear facelock and was squeezing his head. I said, "Reggie, can you believe it? I've finally learned how to work!" He was laughing so hard. I was hurting him, but he was laughing, anyway. He appreciated the joke.

Maurice "Mad Dog" Vachon turned the tables on me in that regard. When I worked with Maurice, he thrashed me every time we got into the ring. I was hit by a constant barrage of elbows, fists and knees. He left me with several souvenirs, including black eyes and bruises. That didn't bother me, though. I enjoyed having a guy really pound on me because I thought that helped maintain the mystique of the business, so a wrestler could do anything he wanted to do to me and I wouldn't complain.

Back in the days when the boys still made wrestling look real, we had something we used called the "office." I never used it with Maurice, but I knew about it. If a person worked really tight, or if he was beating the hell out of you, and you wanted him to loosen up, you gave him the "office." That means you take your middle finger, or your index finger, and your thumb, gently grip his arm or wrist, and give it a gentle squeeze. That meant, "loosen up," or "take it easy."

Several years ago, Mad Dog was in Atlanta. I think it was in the early '90s when the old-timers came back for a legends show. That was the first time I had seen Maurice in many, many years. He walked over to me and said, "You know, Rock. I've been in the business for thirty-five years, and I never knew what this meant." He grabbed my wrist and gave me the office. We all got a big chuckle out of that. That explained why he was shooting in every match. He didn't know anything else. Most of the guys back then were like that. Every match was on the edge of being a

shoot. In some cases, it was a shoot.

Nobody, until the past few years, and maybe even now, would admit to being 100 percent certain that what Gene and I were doing wasn't real. People have told me, "We saw an awful lot of bullsh–, but when you and Gene were in the ring, it sure looked like it was real." And that's exactly what our goal was. I didn't care so much about the fact that four matches on a card were bullsh–. I didn't like it, but that wasn't something I had any control over. However, if you could point out the matches I was in that looked like they were bullsh–, let me know which ones you thought were. That's why I thought the matches between Jack Brisco and Dory Funk were incredible examples of what a wrestling match could be. Dory and Jack had some of the best matches I have ever seen. You believed every minute of their matches.

Roddy Piper nailed me one night. When we got back to the dressing room, he said "I'm sorry for potatoing you." A potato was our word for a

punch or a kick that landed solidly.

"It's no problem," I assured him. "It was okay."

He went on. "No, I hit you. I didn't mean to hurt you."

"No, no. You didn't hurt me."

"Yeah, but I hit you really hard."

"It's okay. Don't worry about it. I didn't feel a thing." Roddy kept pressing until I finally said what he wanted to hear. "Man, that was one hell of a punch. You just about knocked me out."

Roddy grinned and said, "Oh, I'm sorry."

Roddy was a tough kid. He just wanted to let me know that he had really nailed me in the ring. He did that one other time. I didn't waste time arguing. I just told him what he wanted to hear.

"I'm sorry. That kick must have hurt."

"Yeah, you hurt me real bad."

"Okay, I'm sorry."

There were times when I did shoot with someone in the ring. I was especially stiff on the TV, but I usually had a reason for being that way. Some of the kids we hired for TV shots were smart asses. Sometimes, they were supposed to be tough kids from the neighborhood. Others were just careless. Their punches and kicks were going everywhere. Sometimes, they just had an attitude and thought they were tough guys, and maybe they just wanted to see if they could beat me. When someone came into the ring with an attitude, I would hit them with a headbutt and loosen their teeth. I kicked guys in the face and knocked them out. I didn't do it without what I felt was a reason, but by the same token, I did it.

I remember one wrestler in particular. He used some karate nonsense on me. I barely managed to back away before he planted a foot in my

mouth. When I shifted backwards, he was in a position where his leg was up in the air beside my face, which meant his head was down close to the mat. I stepped inside his leg and punched him in the jaw. He laid there on the mat, just about unconscious. Charlie Smith was the referee. Charlie said, "I think the guy's almost out." Then he asked my opponent, "Do you give up?"

I stopped him. "Charlie, I'll tell you when he gives up." I picked the guy up by one arm and kicked him in the face, then I covered him and said, "Now, Charlie. Now you can count him out."

The cameramen were dumbfounded when they came to the realization that the guy was really knocked out. He also was bleeding like a stuck pig, which earned me another command reception with Ted Turner for the following Monday morning. When Ted finished his little speech, I simply asked him, "Ted, are you telling me that I should be throwing my matches?"

"No, but ..."

"Well, I don't. That was a real match."

Was Ted smart to the business? Officially, no. He thought the business was all a farce, but every now and then, he would have reason to think, at least from my standpoint, that it wasn't all put on. Again, if someone watched Gene and me work, it was hard for them to make a judgment and allege that it was all an act. You can't classify all of professional wrestling as bullsh– just because you see an occasional lousy match.

When Ted Turner televised the Georgia Championship Wrestling show, he was told by Jim Barnett, the wrestling promoter in Georgia, that wrestling was fake. "Oh, Ted. It's all a fake." That's exactly how Barnett said it.

I took Barnett aside later and said, "Jim! Don't tell Ted Turner or anybody else anything about the business."

"Oh, they know," he answered.

"Dammit, Jim," I said. "Nobody knows for sure, not even Ted. Every so often, one of the guys comes back with a busted nose, or a black eye. It makes people stop and wonder. The only thing people really know about wrestling is what someone who is officially in the business tells them."

Barnett didn't want to tell everybody. He just wanted to tell Ted Turner and a few thousand select people. His implication was that everybody already knew it, but just to be on the good side of Turner, he would tell him. I remember the first time it happened. Ted said, "Barnett told me that wrestling is all fake."

I simply said to him, "You know Barnett. You've seen Barnett. We let him think that wrestling is put on, and some of it is, but we never let him know that there's going to be a real wrestling match, because he's a little bit different. I'm sure you'll

agree to that."

"Oh, yeah. I can see that."

Even in the old days, if we booked women wrestlers on a show, some of the people thought that was bullsh–. If we booked midgets on a show, most of the people thought that was bullsh–. What they weren't sure about was whether or not my matches were bullsh–. Even though we were working, there were times when it wasn't bullsh–. From my standpoint, my partner, Gene Anderson, and I defined pro wrestling by what we did in the ring, not by what someone else did. We tried to convince everyone that everything we were doing was real. We didn't care what anybody else did.

Of course, we did our absolute best to protect the wrestling business when we were away from the ring, too. In defense of what we were doing, I might say, "In 1919, the White Sox threw the World Series, but does that mean baseball players

have to defend baseball every time they play a game? There are boxing matches that have been accused of being phony, but would you get into the ring with Mike Tyson or Evander Holyfield? More than likely, you wouldn't. It's also highly possible that there are people in wrestling who would throw their matches, but what can I do about it? I can't do anything about it. All I can tell you is that you won't see me or Gene throwing a match."

Depending on the person I was talking to and the situation, I even went so far as to offer a plausible explanation by saying, "Listen, if you want to say that what I was doing was fake because I knew how long I was going to wrestle with my opponent — well, then you can call it fake. But the truth is, I knew I could beat my opponent any time I wanted, so the promoter could say to me, 'Ole, we need to fill some time. Can you handle the guy for ten minutes?' I would say, 'Yeah.'"

I would explain how wrestling was a lot like

boxing. "Good boxers, just like good wrestlers, can control a match. They let a match go for a round or two, or more, before laying their opponent out. They want to give the people their money's worth."

I went on to explain. "When you're watching TV, we're wrestling people with high school or collegiate wrestling backgrounds, or just tough guys off the street. Sometimes, we beat the hell out of them, sometimes we don't. It all depends on what kind of an attitude they have. If they're smart asses, I kick the hell out of them."

That was true. If they were polite, if they said "Yes, sir" and "No, sir", if they didn't try to hook me, or try to do something damaging to me, then all I was going to do was wrestle. I didn't punch or kick. I just wrestled, and then beat them.

"Now if I'm good enough, then I know I can beat them," I continued. Of course, I told everybody that I was good enough, but that was always in

reference to the squash matches on television. I would never claim I was good enough to go out and beat a main event wrestler like Mr. Wrestling #2 whenever I wanted. I did say something like, "If I know I can beat my opponent at any time, then before the match, I tell the referee to let me know when we get to the eight-minute mark. When the match begins, my opponent really does his best to beat me, but I hold him at bay until the referee says, 'Okay, eight minutes are gone, Ole.' That was my cue to end the match, so I started to figure out how I was going to take the guy. Of course, by that time, I already knew what his weaknesses were, so it was just a matter of taking him down and beating him. I could just about put it right on the money."

"Now," I concluded, "if you want to call that fake, then go call it fake."

When you explain it like that to someone, it makes all the sense in the world. That's exactly the way it could be done.

I'm not sure if anyone was ever convinced by those rationales, but we tried to come up with some kind of a logical explanation. Of course, I also found myself unsure as to whether I should say anything at all. Sometimes, you know, "Methinks thou doth protesteth too much." The fact that you defend it might lead someone to think that perhaps something is in the works. But it explained a lot in regards to the TV matches not looking completely legitimate, or why I would even be wrestling an inexperienced guy on television. I would explain it by saying, "It's really simple. We wrestle guys with less experience on television because we want you to pay to see the competitive wrestling matches."

I wrestled quite a few guys on television without giving them a finish. In fact, my opponent didn't have to know anything. They could get into the ring with me and do whatever they wanted to do. We had one guy, in particular, who wanted to wrestle for us. He strolled up to me in Rome, Georgia, and said, "I used to work for Nick

Gulas."

"What?" I acted like I didn't even know who Nick Gulas was. Nick Gulas was the wrestling promoter in Tennessee, Kentucky, and Alabama.

"Up in Tennessee," the guy explained.

"Oh. And your point is?"

"I just want to let you know that I've got my wrestling stuff. Whenever you're short a wrestler, I can always fill in."

I brushed him off.

A month later, I was in Carrollton, Georgia, and somebody didn't show up. That rarely happened, but the guy I had met in Rome walked up again and said, "Hey, do you remember me?"

"No," I answered.

He explained and said, "I told you that I could fill

in whenever you needed."

"Well, we're short a guy tonight. It's too bad that you don't have your gear."

"Hey, I always have it in the car."

I made his day for him. "Well, here's your chance. Go get your stuff."

When he ran out of the building to go get his gear, I went into the dressing room and said, "Listen, there's a guy coming in. Everybody kayfabe it." Kayfabe was a word we used when an outsider, someone not knowledgeable about the inner workings of the wrestling business, walked up or came into a room. It warned everyone to keep quiet and not talk openly about the wrestling business.

The guy came in, sat down, and changed into his wrestling gear. I asked him, "Where did you wrestle before?"

"I was up in Tennessee."

"Nuts. They do cartoon wrestling up there. Do you know anything about amateur wrestling?"

"Yeah, I can wrestle."

"Okay, tonight we'll just go out there and wrestle."

"What do you want me to do?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Well, who's going over?"

"Going over where?"

"Who's gonna win?"

"How the hell do I know? If you can beat the guy, you're gonna win. If he can beat you, he's gonna win."

He thought about that for a few seconds, and then asked, "Do you mean this is a real wrestling match?"

"Yeah! What the hell do you think it is?"

He began to say, "Well, up in Tennessee ..."

I cut him off and said, "I've heard about Tennessee rasslin'. That's all a bunch of fake crap up there."

He looked puzzled for a few seconds, but then his face lit up and he said, "Damn. I'm glad to know that wrestling is real down here. This is the kind of wrestling I like! You know, real wrestling."

I gave him a few instructions. "Your match is gonna have a twenty-minute time limit. Ronnie West will be your referee. I'd like you to just go out there and wrestle. Don't kick, don't punch, and don't bite. Just get out there and wrestle."

"Boy, that's what I like!" he said enthusiastically.

"If you beat the guy, you win. After that, we'll talk about having you wrestle a few more times."

"Boy, that's great! This is so much different than it is in Tennessee. You know, in Tennessee, they wave their tie when they want you to go home."

I continued to play dumb. "Why would we want you to go home? You're here to wrestle."

"No, when they want you to go to the finish."

"Finish what?" I asked.

"When they want you to beat your opponent, they wave their tie or give you a sign."

"You just beat the guy whenever you can."

He was going to work with Rick McGraw. Rick had wrestled in high school and could handle himself in the ring, so I sent Ronnie West over to tell Rick a few things. "Watch this guy really close. Don't kick him or punch him. Just try to do

some amateur wrestling with him and see what happens. If worst comes to worst, just kick the hell out of him, then pin him."

We were all excited because we were going to watch a shoot. That's the funny thing about the wrestling business. The wrestlers get all excited about a shoot. Even the old-timers get roused up over the prospect of seeing a shoot. We were all standing outside the dressing room watching the match that was going on. McGraw and the guy were going to be on next. All of a sudden, the dressing room door bangs open and somebody just blows by me. I looked over — and it was the guy. He was heading for the front entrance of the auditorium, running like a deer in flight. Before I could figure out what was going on, he was through the front door. I took off after him, but as I stepped outside, a car whizzed by. He was out of there. The match never happened.

Another month or so went by and we were back in Rome, Georgia. Someone walked up beside me

and said, "Boy, you had me fooled."

I look over — and it was the same guy. I said, "It's you, you son-of-a-bitch! I'm gonna kill you."

His eyes got as big as saucers. He said, "Oh, my God! It is real!" He took off again.

We even fooled people like Buzz Sawyer and Don Kernodle, who were good amateur wrestlers, and Tony Atlas, who was just a strong, tough kid. Buzz first went to the wrestling matches when he was a teenager. His friends goaded him to come up to ringside and challenge me, or to give me an earful of grief. When I asked, "Why didn't you?," he said, "I just wasn't too sure." Tony Atlas used to go to the matches in Roanoke, Virginia, when he was a kid. He also had friends who tried to prompt him to jump me. I asked him the same question. "Why didn't you?" He laughed and said, "Well, we thought wrestling was bullsh–, but we weren't too sure about it."

That's pretty much the way we operated. That was the way all the old promoters operated — Verne Gagne, Eddie Graham, Bill Watts, Roy Shire. They knew they had to have some wrestling. They knew they had to have some bullsh–. Even the Sheik, Ed Farhat. Talk about bullsh–! Farhat ran his whole business on bullsh–. But! The one ingredient Farhat had that worked was that the fans believed he was nuts. They believed he was nuts. They really did believe his Sheik character was legitimate. They didn't think he was a wrestler. They thought he was a lunatic who would cut you in a heartbeat — and he would. He taped razor blades to his fingers. When he left the ring, he would cut people on his way back to the dressing room. I don't know if anybody ever put two and two together and realized that he had razor blades on his fingers, but even if they did, they would have simply said, "He's got razor blades on his fingers and he's cutting people with them. What a madman! What's fake about that? He's crazy!" That's all Farhat wanted. You didn't hear

the Detroit fans say, "The Sheik is phony," because they were scared to death of him.

Gene and I assumed that most people were a little hesitant because they weren't quite sure just how tough we were. Even guys who got smart in the business weren't quite sure what the deal was because I always had an insolent attitude.

For the most part, the wrestlers didn't share information about the business with outsiders, but even back in the '60s, some of the guys confided things to the fans — the arena rats, in particular. Arena rats were the groupies who hung around the matches in the hope of getting picked up by one of the wrestlers. One incident that comes to memory involved a wrestler who was featured on top on small house shows. Most of the time, he was used in the middle or lower end of the card. He and I had a singles match in Columbia, South Carolina. Of course, I beat him. Let me rephrase that. I don't want to come across sounding like Arn Anderson did in his book, Arn

Anderson 4 Ever. He talked about most of his matches as if they were shoots. I didn't beat him. I went over. I got my hand raised. As I was walking to my car, a girl walked up and said, "You couldn't beat that guy in an honest match. The promoter told him that he had to lose."

"Where in the hell did you get that idea?," I asked. "Who told you that?"

"He told me that he had to lose the match or the promoter would blackball him and see to it that he never wrestled again."

I was hot. Just then, the wrestler walked out of the building. "Well, why don't you go tell him that he can have a match with me right here in the parking lot? I would be more than happy to do that — with no promoters involved." She ran over to tell the wrestler. I waited. The wrestler got in his car and left.

Of course, that was just one incident, but that

wrestler wasn't alone when it came to running his mouth about the business. I'm sure that was a common excuse used by quite a few wrestlers, especially those who never made it to the main event. A lot of the guys gave out information they shouldn't have because they thought it would pave the way to getting into the arena rats' pants. I can only imagine how many guys said that and I never heard about it.

In the '80s, fan-produced newsletters became a thorn in our flesh when they began exposing the business. When the ragsheets first began publishing, they caused a big uproar. The promoters threatened to fire anybody who talked to them. It was an empty threat. The ragsheets had everything within minutes and nobody was ever fired. Years ago, the rumor was that Jim Ross was calling the ragsheets and feeding them information. During that time, one of the ragsheets took a poll, asking the readers to vote on various categories, one of which was Best Wrestling Announcer. Jim was voted the "best wrestling

announcer in the universe." I have no idea how it happened, but that specific issue of the ragsheet dropped out of the sky and landed on the boss' desk.

Looking back on it, I realize that the boys weren't the only ones responsible for leaking the information. In some instances, it was the employers who were leaking the information. When Ted Turner was in charge of wrestling, they hired suits to do the job of running pro wrestling. They had no wrestling background whatsoever, and probably not very much in business. However, it was inevitable that some of the boys would also spill their guts. We had guys on the fringe of the business who were anxious to talk to anybody about anything. However, you also have to understand that by 1983, many of the guys in the business were no longer "the boys." They were just people who had been smartened up, who thought professional wrestling was just a matter of jumping onto their opponent from a balcony. They didn't look at the business as being something

important enough to protect. When I started out, Verne Gagne didn't tell me it was a business until months after I got stretched by Danny Hodge and Dale Lewis. That's quite a bit different from someone who got into wrestling just because one of their friends smartened them up.

"Hey, Joe. Why don't you get into the rasslin' business?"

"I don't know if I can do it."

"Well, what's your background?"

"Oh, my background is that I always loved to watch professional wrestling and I always dreamed about being a professional wrestler."

"Okay, you are one!"

The kayfabe sheets aren't a big deal anymore. How can a sheet be a threat to a business that had been exposed by Vince McMahon? What are they going to say? "Big

news! Wrestling is all phony!" What's news about that? Vince McMahon stood up, said the business was all make-believe, and his only competition was Walt Disney World. The fact that Vince did that really ticked me off at first, but once he took that step, the kayfabe sheets lost a lot of their significance.

In later years, the Internet took over from the ragsheets. If The Suits at WCW sent out a memo, the information was posted on the Internet within an hour. When WCW sent a memo around telling key individuals about the company going out of business, it was on the Internet ten minutes after it was handed out. Every secret the company had was on the Internet in minutes.

Before the ragsheets and the Internet, we had newspapers. I never paid any attention to them, either, but we had newspaper people show up every so often. A girl from the Atlanta newspaper approached me one time about doing an interview. I was up front with her. "I'm not

interested. You people seldom write about us, and when you do, you knock the fans and talk about them like they're idiots. You take pictures of someone screaming, or jumping up and down, and make them look like a bumpkin."

She said, "Well, if we don't get an interview, then we might have to run a negative article." Well, that's all they ever ran, anyway. We never got good publicity, but I didn't care what they wrote.

When she asked for a free pass to the matches, I said, "You're welcome to come in, but you buy a ticket just like anybody else."

The only thing I did with one of the newsstand magazines was when Bill Apter called and asked if I would be willing to participate in a story they were publishing in their pro wrestling magazine. They wanted to create the Rookie of the Year award. He wanted a segment on our television show, so I gave him a minute or

two. That was during the time when we were fighting to keep our company out of the hands of Vince McMahon, so I really wasn't paying a whole lot of attention to business. That was the only time I ever got involved with one of the magazines.

I liked Bill Apter, even after he walked into the dressing room one day and began cursing a blue streak, talking in half sentences. The first time I heard him do that, I took the bait. "Who are you supposed to be?"

He cursed for another ten seconds, and then he said, "I'm Ole Anderson."

Very funny.

In 1994, when I was with World Championship Wrestling, I got demoted to the B team and was sent to help Jody Hamilton train the new kids down at the gym. Most of the kids had no wrestling background. They just took steroids and worked out in the gym. By that time, everybody knew

wrestling was nothing more than a show. Vince McMahon had already broadcast that to the world. At the same time, I was trying to show the trainees how to work, so they could convince the audience that their match was a shoot. All the prospective wannabes were standing around, listening. I called Erik Watts into the ring and we locked up. I don't remember the sequence, but we wound up against the ropes. I backed up, looked at Erik, and said, "Dammit, Erik. I told you before. Don't do that again, all right? We're trying to show these guys how to make things look real."

We went back to the center of the ring and locked up. We tugged around and I got him against the ropes again. I raised my voice and said, "Jesus, Erik! Are you f—in' deaf or what? Can't you understand what I'm trying to tell you?" He gave me a strange, somewhat irritated look, so I slapped him on the face. "Dammit, get your act together or I'll kick your ass for real."

We began again. Before we went too long, I hit him with a knee. I got him on the ground, grabbed him by the hair, and started ripping his face apart. The whole time, I was swearing at him. "You stupid son-of-a-bitch! How many times do I have to tell you?" Then I stopped, right in the middle of my tirade, and looked over at the kids outside the ring. They were just standing there. Their eyes were as big as saucers. Their mouths were hanging open. I looked over at them and said, "Well, did you buy it?"

Erik started laughing as he stood up. As understanding sank in, every one of those guys let out a long breath. "Do you see?" I asked, as the tension slowly left the room. My whole point was, how many guys did I convince that it was a shoot when I was working with Erik?

The answer?

All of them.

By that time, though, it was obvious that it wasn't a requirement to know anything about wrestling. In order to get a job, there was no need to learn anything. All they had to do was continue the nonsense that everybody else was doing. There was nothing to it, and there was little need to learn anything. But little did they know, Ted Turner's World Championship Wrestling company would be out of business by 2001.

Chapter 12
The Hooker

I've already talked about a few very good amateurs like Verne Gagne and Danny Hodge. However, from the late '30s through the early '60s, professional wrestling was synonymous with the name Lou Thesz. Known in Japan as the God of Professional Wrestling and the Iron Man of the 20th Century, Lou won the world heavyweight title for the first time in 1937 when he was just 21 years old.

I met Lou Thesz for the first time in Greenville, South Carolina in 1968. I didn't see him again until 1982, when I worked a couple of shots for Joe Blanchard, the promoter in San Antonio.

Since I never had the opportunity to be around Lou much during my wrestling years, I decided to visit him at his home during the fall of 2001. When

I woke up that first morning, he was ready to work out. I wasn't expecting that from an 85-year-old man, but that was fine with me. We went to the gym at his condo and played around for a while on the few machines they had. If you know anything about Lou Thesz, you don't work out without getting on the mat. I don't think he gave the first thought to the fact that he was 85 years old. We danced around a little and Lou showed me a few moves, the most memorable being the one where he gives you a massage by rubbing the bony ridge of his head across your mouth and nose. Of course, I immediately tried to pull away, only to realize that he had slipped his hand behind my head. He wasn't going to make it easy for me to go anywhere.

By the time my face felt like it was made of JELL-O, he decided to demonstrate his version of the double wristlock. Lou's version was similar to the way the guys did it when I was wrestling, but he showed me where the hold was supposed to go after you get it locked in. Lou started to take the

arm up around the top of my head and all but jerked my arm out of place. Of course, he never completed the move, or I wouldn't have an arm or shoulder. That was something I never knew before. Only then did I remember that the same variation of the hold had been put on me before. It was the hold Lou Talaber used on me during the workout I had with the old-timers before I got into the business. I didn't remember it until Lou reminded me in his not-so-subtle way. Talaber used the same hold, but he didn't finish it off like Lou did. If a guy knew how to use the hold the way Lou used it, it could really lead to disastrous results.

Lou showed me other wrestling holds that I never knew about, some of which allowed me to see parts of my body that I have never seen before. The most striking view I had was when he had my leg jacked up over my shoulder, placing me face-to-face with my asshole. That was when I had to politely and quietly ask, "Hey, Lou! Hey, shit! Take it easy on me!"

Lou was really nice. He really didn't do anything to hurt me — at least not anything that would leave me with any lasting pain, but my shoulders are in such bad shape that it didn't take much to make me feel like I had been dragged across town behind a garbage truck. The irony of it all is that he didn't act like he was putting out a lot of effort. He was just horsing around.

Lou was 86 when he passed away on April 28, 2002, just a few months before we completed the first draft of this book. Did he have enough left at that age that he could have done something with somebody? Oh, yeah! He still had all the knowledge that he had picked up through the years, and he still had enough physical power left to do something. If he hooked up with a guy on the level of Kurt Angle or an Olympic caliber wrestler, I don't know how he would have fared. I do know that if he was able to hook someone with that double wristlock, he could have jerked their arm out of the socket and possibly ripped it out at the shoulder.

Lou and I were on vastly different levels when it came to actual wrestling skills. Lou had credentials that went way beyond anything I could even dream about. In fact, to some degree, since I didn't have those legitimate credentials of being an Olympic athlete, or a National champion, maybe I went overboard when I tried to compete with people. I had enough of a background in amateur wrestling to be able to say that I was able to fend for myself, but in no way did I compete and achieve at the level that Lou did.

However, where Lou and I had a lot in common was in our respect for the business. I think our attitudes toward the business were very similar. I believed in the business just as strongly as Lou did. We both wanted to give the people a good show, but more important, we wanted people to believe that what we were doing in the ring was a shoot.

If I had been around in the 1930s, I would have done one of two things. I would have become

good enough to compete with those guys, or I would have quit. I think my attitude would have convinced the other wrestlers and promoters that I was a hard-working kid who wouldn't give up or walk away just because things got a little tough. With my mindset, I believe I would have been willing to hang in there and work hard to learn the skills necessary to survive. I would have made an effort to become as good a shooter as I could possibly be.

I think the people who were wrestling during Lou's time, and before Lou, were people who excelled at wrestling. They were in a position where they had to learn to perform, or work, but they could still wrestle when the situation called for it. As time progressed into the '50s, which was Verne Gagne's heyday, it was understood that shoots were no longer attracting the people who bought the tickets. As a result, the wrestlers and promoters began to make concessions as they began to understand the importance of performing and showmanship. They came to the realization

that a lot of money could be made by featuring performers, in contrast to mat wrestlers. There was still a number of legitimate wrestlers getting into pro wrestling, but legitimate wrestlers were supplemented with bodies who could perform. People weren't willing to pay just to see two guys shoot against each other. Shoots are a lot like college wrestling. To the average fan, they can be boring. I enjoy amateur wrestling, and a lot of other people do, but there aren't huge numbers of people who would pay fifteen cents to watch it. While the two competitors are maneuvering and trying to get into a position to make a move, the people would be yelling. "What are they doing? They're just walking around!" And in the '50s, the people wanted to be entertained. Anytime you charge money to see an event, the people want to be entertained. They want to enjoy themselves.

By the time I started wrestling, there weren't many people with wrestling backgrounds getting into the business. We still had some tough kids

getting in, even though they didn't have wrestling experience, and I have no doubt that many of them were tougher than I was. However, most of the people coming in didn't offer the level of competitiveness that people did during the time when Lou Thesz and Verne Gagne were at the top of their game. In fact, according to Lou, the number of people with wrestling backgrounds had dropped off tremendously.

In 1968, Gene and I were wrestling in Richmond, Virginia. Joe Louis, the former world heavyweight boxing champion, was going to be the referee for our match against George Becker and Johnny Weaver. I was concerned because I thought Louis was going to be grand-standing, showing the crowd how tough and important he was, which would take away from the match.

We were outside in a ballpark and the place was packed. Since I'm considered to be an old-timer, I have to say the place was packed. Whenever any of the old-timers mention a show they headlined, it

was always "packed." You'll never hear a wrestler say, "I was in the main event and the house was just so-so." It was always sold-out, standing room only, people hanging from the rafters, and the line of people who couldn't get in stretched for miles and miles. I'm not saying it didn't ever happen that way because we turned thousands away, but in the memories of most of the guys, every show they headlined was a packed house.

When Joe Louis stepped into the ring, he got an enthusiastic reaction from the crowd. I can't tell you my exact words, but I said something to him along the lines of, "If you get in my way, I'll stick your head up your ass." I was trying to be the tough guy and I wanted Joe Louis to know that he wasn't going to take anything away from our match. When the match began, Joe Louis didn't do much more than stand in the corner. He didn't have any reason to prove himself one way or another.

After the match, Joe Murnick, the promoter, walked up and asked me what had happened. Either someone told him or he got the impression that I had said something derogatory to Joe Louis. The first question he directed at me was, "Ole, how do you make your money?"

"I get paid based on the number of people that come to see the matches and the spot I am on the card."

"Well, you call yourself a Swede. How many Swedes do you think were out there watching you tonight?"

"As far as I know, there aren't any."

"Then how many people do you think came to see you, Ole?"

"I don't have any idea," I answered honestly.

"How many people do you think came to see Joe Louis?"

I was stuck. He summed it all up for me. "The next time you're in a situation like this, you need to think more about trying to make money and entertaining the people, as opposed to trying to gratify your own ego."

A few days later, Joe Louis was back in for another round as our referee. I stopped him in the hallway and apologized to him. Joe never had much to say about anything. He just shook his head and said, "That's all right."

I did go on to give Joe some advice, though. "You're the referee," I told him. "You need to establish your authority. Get out of the corner. When you get us in the middle of the ring to give us our instructions, I'll put my finger in front of your nose and make a comment. You slap my hand away. That way, the people will see that you're in charge. They'll understand that you're not going to let the Andersons run roughshod over you or anyone else as long as you're in that ring."

As soon as we were in the ring, I began to give Joe a bad time. I put my finger in his face and said, "Remember what I told you." He stared at me for a few seconds, and then he pulled his right hand back with his fist cocked. When he did, I put my hands up into the air and took a couple of steps back. The people went nuts. The match was decent and everybody was happy with the results. Afterwards, when I walked into the dressing room, Joe Murnick said simply, "Now, what did that cost you?"

And he was right. It didn't cost me anything and the people were happy with Joe Louis because they believed he was the authority in the ring, and Gene and I made sure he was. When he told us to break, we broke. When we got a little bit nasty with our opponents, he would step in and say, "Okay, that's enough." And we stopped. That was an early lesson for me in the value of entertainment and showmanship.

Until the late '50s, and possibly into the '60s, Lou

was able to give the people a match that was pretty much based on 90 percent solid wrestling. In the '60s, however, the structure of the wrestling business as a whole began to change. It might not have changed too drastically for Lou himself because he was known as a wrestler's wrestler. He may have continued to ground his matches on actual wrestling. When I broke in, though, we were doing what was considered to be wrestling, but it was what I always called "bullshit wrestling," or "headlock wrestling." We didn't always use the holds that could really hurt somebody. On the other hand, they weren't the holds where you laid on the ground for fifteen minutes, either.

When I first got into the business, Gene and I used to make jokes about the old-timers' style of wrestling. For instance, when we were in the dressing room, we would demonstrate a 1930's-style match. The headlock was the easiest hold to use for the demonstration. I would grab a headlock with my left arm. Gene would squat down and

place his left knee on the mat, and I would sit down on his right knee. I would say, "This is what you guys did for the first ten minutes of your match," and we would stare in one direction for a few seconds. After moving 90 degrees to the left, I would say, "This is what you did for the second ten minutes." We repeated the sequence until we hit all points of the compass. We would do that whenever any of the old-timers were passing through. We thought that was hilarious. Of course, some of those guys couldn't see the humor in it. I was only around them for a short time because most of them were getting up in years. It's probably a good thing.

If you go back far enough to where a majority of the people thought professional wrestling was a shoot, then just the fact that it was a shoot was enough to draw money, to whatever degree. This is where there has to be a big difference between Lou and me. With all respect to Lou, Verne, and all the other guys — I really believe it was much more difficult to draw money in the '60s, '70s and

‘80s, especially in the territories where the towns were running on a weekly basis.

Before the 1990s, the person who hired and fired the wrestlers was the booker. The booker worked for the owner of the territory, the promoter. The booker planned the matches and the television programs, and decided who was going to win or lose. I think in Lou’s day, the biggest thing the booker had to determine was, who was going over, or whether the match was going to be a broadway. I’m reasonably certain that if most of the matches followed that pattern, it was easier to book shows. The promoter walks into the dressing room, sticks his pointer finger out, and says, "Okay, you’re going over, you’re going over, you’re going over." Two of the guys in the room are pretty good wrestlers and neither one wants to do a job [lose the match]. Okay, now we have a shoot. That’s still easy. As the years went by, though, things became so much more involved.

By the time the ‘60s rolled around, the business

required you to have real booking ability. It wasn't just a matter of writing names in two columns on a sheet of paper. You had to figure out what had been done the week before with Johnny Weaver, or Sandy Scott, or whoever was on the card. You had to figure out what you were going to do on TV to persuade the people to buy a ticket to see the blowoff match. That's when booking became much more difficult. I don't believe Lou ever had to spend hours working on angles and finishes. I used to work 20 hours a day, trying to come up with new ideas that would improve the quality of the matches at both the house shows and on television.

I'm using figures like the '50s and '60s as ballpark numbers, as a benchmark, but as time went by, it was getting harder and harder to convince people that any of the matches were legitimate. In the '60s, the best we could hope for is what Gene and I tried to achieve. We tried to convince people that no matter what anyone else was doing, we were shooting. But we weren't

doing it by using legitimate collegiate holds. We were doing it with legitimate professional wrestling holds, along with a few amateur holds thrown in. How long can you do a switch, or a sit-out, or a double-leg takedown, and keep the audience happy? "Okay, we've seen that. What's next?" You have to tie up with your opponent, get a headlock, and take him over. You have to slam him once in awhile. When the people see that, they say, "Yeah, that's wrestling." You had to do more and more to get a reaction from the audience because as time went by, the people became more and more smart to the program. You were past the days when you could fool everybody all the time. You just tried to fool some of the people some of the time.

In the '60s and '70s, the holds we used were more for show than actual competition. If we used a front facelock, that was good enough to convince the fans that we were wrestling. If we used a headlock, that was good enough to convince the fans that we were wrestling. The same thing

applied to a hammerlock or a toehold. Most of the holds have their roots in the shoots and the hooks, but we did them in such a way that they weren't painful or crippling holds. In most cases, we did a toehold in such a way that it wouldn't hurt, but if we wanted to, we could also apply it in a way that it would hurt. More than likely, Lou Thesz could have turned most of the holds we used into a hook-type of hold that would hurt an amateur wrestler, or a guy off the street.

If anybody asked me to demonstrate a toehold, a hammerlock, or a wristlock, I could show it to them in such a way that it would hurt them. I could also use it in the ring and make it look like it was applied in the same manner, except for a subtle difference that the fans wouldn't be able to notice. The average person looking at it couldn't really tell the difference between the two. There was a difference, though. One version could hurt you. The other was a working hold, one that wouldn't do any damage. Take the double wristlock, for instance. I don't know if there was

much difference between the way I used a double wristlock and the way Lou used it when we were performing. However, as I said, there are some nuances I wasn't aware of that made Lou's variation of the double wristlock more effective.

The headlock, as we used it, is another good example of a working hold. Strangler Lewis, the legendary shooter who made a name for himself in the early 1900s, knew how to apply a headlock in such a way that it could actually be a submission hold. At least, I think he was able to. He was reputed to have tremendous crushing power with any object he held between his arm and chest, developed through training by squeezing a wooden model of a human head.

There are a couple of ways to apply a headlock. Most people didn't know how to apply it properly. They applied it in a way that was fairly ineffective. If a mark grabbed me in a headlock, he'd do it where the flat of his wrist was against my head. For the most part, that's the way

most of the pro wrestlers used it when they were working. That method really wasn't effective in a shoot, in a real contest, and anyone with any wrestling experience could figure that out right away. At that point, you might have thought, Jeez, the whole idea of a headlock is baloney.

On the other hand, I can show you another version of a headlock that will make you scream. To me, if you wanted the hold to have some detrimental effect on your opponent, the way the wrist was positioned was very, very important. I turned my wrist so the wrist bone was grating against my opponent's head. I don't know if Strangler Lewis did it that way. He may have been so strong that it wouldn't have made a difference. But that's the way I did everything, whether I was working or shooting. That bone would lodge itself under my opponent's nose, which was the best place to put it, or alongside the eye. I would say, "Here's the way you do it when you really want to put some pressure on your opponent." By the time I have the hold cinched up good and tight, you're going to be

absolutely convinced that the headlock is a legitimate shoot hold. Your reaction is going to be more like, "Holy balls! I didn't know it was like that!"

No matter which method we used in the ring as professionals, we convinced the fans that the headlock was one of the toughest holds ever used. What most people off the street never thought about, however, is that if someone off the street grabbed a headlock in a shoot, their opponent, if they knew wrestling, could have escaped from it in two seconds. In fact, sometimes, the headlock would have been the worst move they could have made. As I said earlier, all you have to do is pick your opponent up and drop him backwards onto his head.

I was once shown a variation of a headlock. Lou referred to it as a headlock with a scissors. I don't quite remember how it was applied, but I do remember trying to do it. It was one of those "How in the hell do you get there from here?"

moves. It wasn't one of those moves you could readily use during a match, and I'm not sure you would even want to. Even if you could figure out how to get into it, from what I remember of it, it didn't look like much. We knew a lot of holds like that, like a hook on an ankle. We used them when we demonstrated holds to people. In a real contest, we could use them and have a person screaming for mercy. However, none of those holds looked very impressive in the ring, so they weren't useful in the professional world.

The sugar hold, which I'll talk about later in the book, isn't very impressive to look at, either, but I used it on football players, and even kids who were so-so wrestlers. I'm not talking about wrestlers who were Olympic or Big Ten champions. I'm talking about people like me, who had some amateur wrestling experience in high school, and maybe some in college. If I could seat that sugar hold on them, they were in big trouble.

Please understand me — I'm not knocking

anybody at this point. I have more respect for some of those old-timers than you'll ever know. But I would be willing to bet that if I watched Lou Thesz and Orville Brown wrestle for eight weeks in a row, and watched them on TV for another three or four hours a week, I would turn it off. That might have worked in the '40s, but people wouldn't accept that in the '60s and '70s.

When I was booking the matches, if I didn't have three matches that were fairly warm, we weren't going to draw any money. It wasn't good enough to simply advertise that Dusty Rhodes would be on the card. Granted, for a short time, you could count on a house that was a little better than average just due to the fact that Dusty was there, but once you saw him, the novelty was gone. On the other hand, if booked correctly, you could feature the same talent for an extended period of time. Gene and I wrestled Wahoo McDaniel and Paul Jones for months, week after week, and consistently drew big houses. When we were in Georgia in 1974, Gene and I wrestled against Mr.

Wrestling #1 and Mr. Wrestling #2 — Tim Woods and Johnny Walker — every week. We came back to Atlanta in 1976 and worked with them again — every week. Look it up! I have nothing but respect for Lou, but the point I'm trying to make is that I believe it was much tougher to draw money in the '60s, '70s, and '80s. Once again, you had to have action and you had to entertain.

It also was important to book in such a way that you didn't continue to give the audience the same thing over and over and over. No matter how exciting something might be, it gets old quick. My goal was to give them something a little different each time. I had an analogy I used to explain it.

While out on a Sunday afternoon drive, you see a dead baby in the middle of the road. "Jeez! What happened?" Everybody pulls over to the side of the road.

"What happened?"

"I don't know. We just saw this baby in the road."

"Is the baby all right?"

"No. I think it's dead. Call for help!"

The police and ambulance arrive. Sure enough, the baby is dead. Everybody is all upset over the fact that the baby is dead. When the ambulance arrives and takes the baby away, you get back into your car and begin talking about it with your friends. "Have you ever seen anything like that in your life?"

"No, in all my years on the road, I've never seen a dead baby laying on the road. I just can't believe it! What a horrible thing to happen."

After driving a couple of miles, you see two more babies in the road. You can't believe it! You pull over and call the cops. A few cars pull over. When the cops get there, they find that the babies are dead. After a few minutes, you get back

into the car and drive off again. Five miles down the road, you see three babies laying in the road. "Are they dead?"

"Yes."

"Get your cell phone out and call the cops. Tell them there's three dead babies laying on the road back there." You don't even stop. You become desensitized. You just don't care.

The idea wasn't to constantly give the fans more, but to do something a little different each week, or better yet, something unique. You didn't say, "All right, this week, we climb to the fifth story of the building and so-and-so jumps off." We could have done that, but what would we follow it with? "Okay, this week, we climb to the sixth story ..." You really had to work on developing new ideas, like bringing in different babyfaces in an attempt to vanquish the no-good heel. That's what we did. We would do that until we ran out of babyfaces, and then we slowly phased out the heel

and brought in someone new.

Since then, wrestling evolved even further. It became more exciting to watch, but at the same time, it became more dangerous for the performers. Of course, the danger has been carried to the Nth degree.

In 1990, I was hired to help coach the wrestlers coming into WCW and to teach them how to wrestle. It wasn't too long before WCW called and told me to stay home. It was evident that even attempting to wrestle was no longer important. The management at WCW thought that the theatrics were the most important part of pro wrestling. In fact, they no longer thought it important to do any kind of wrestling. Their idea of entertainment was to have wrestlers jump off of balconies, or slam each other through tables. What have theatrics done for the wrestling business? Since theatrics took the place of wrestling, all but one of the major wrestling promotions have gone out of business, putting a lot

of wrestlers out of work.

Chapter 13
“I wanna be a rassler”

Gene and I started wrestling the marks around the end of 1968 and continued through 1970. Every now and then, someone would walk into old man Crockett’s office, wanting to know how they could become a rassler. Most of the time, it was just somebody off the street who watched wrestling on television, or who went to the matches in the area. In some cases, they were tough kids. In others, they were guys who claimed to have been in the business at one time or another, or guys who thought they were smart to the business, but had never actually been in the business. Every now and then, someone would walk in with a manager, or wearing a hood. That would really piss me off. That guy was just a piece of meat to us. Regardless, there was an endless supply of people who wanted to know how they could get into rassling.

I had much the same outlook that Eddie Graham did when it came to wanna-be wrestlers who walked in with a know-it-all, arrogant attitude. You have to understand my attitude from the standpoint that, once I got into the business, I really got into the business. I took it seriously and treated it like it was a shoot. I wanted to keep it that way because I wanted to continue to make money, and I didn't think it was going to make money if everybody said, "Oh, I know wrestling isn't real." I didn't appreciate comments like that because many of our matches were brutal. We had matches with Wahoo McDaniel and Paul Jones that were killers. Sure, we were working, but how many people could go full speed ahead for two hours. It was a tough job and it wasn't something that just anybody could do.

When the marks walked in, old man Crockett would schedule a time for the workout and tell them to meet us at the Coliseum in Charlotte, or the Park Center, where we used to wrestle on Mondays. If the wannabes were from another

town, we insisted that they come to Charlotte because I wasn't driving any distance to go work out with anybody. In any case, the ring would be set up early in the morning.

Most of the time, we didn't have any idea of what those people were capable of doing, and I'm sure that a lot of them were pretty tough. However, we didn't worry about their ability because we had a definite advantage over them. Even if they had experience as a college wrestler, our reputations alone would have them psyched up and worried. We also kept ourselves in great cardiovascular shape. Again, I wasn't at the level Lou was, but I was good enough that I could wrestle for two hours and come out of the ring feeling good. I was good enough that I could jump rope for 30 minutes and then go do my workout. I could play handball for a couple of hours and still be bouncing around, while everybody else had their tongue hanging out. If you were in good shape, you could do a lot because you could just keep on going. That was important when you

found yourself wrestling someone who was a whole lot better than you. If you could hold him at bay long enough, then your being in shape would allow you to beat him because he would eventually poop out. The fact that they were nervous was another big factor in our favor. Sometimes, they would be blown up and exhausted before we got started.

I have to admit that some of the kids who came through were pretty tough, but did they have an extensive knowledge of wrestling? No. If they did, did they have experience in the amateurs beyond high school? No. Did they have more than one or two years of college experience? No. A few of them might have been on a college wrestling team, but they weren't that good. They weren't Big Ten or National champions like the Steiners. In no way am I saying that we took on the University of Iowa wrestling team or people of that caliber.

Of course, we never knew what we might run

into. The guys off the streets could be unpredictable, so there was a real danger in shooting with them. You never really knew what one of those guys might try. Tim Woods learned that the hard way. Timmy was wrestling a guy who was reputed to be a tough SOB. It turned out that the guy was! He bit Timmy's finger off. That's what the shooters had to contend with when they took on the marks. If someone has the inclination to do something bad to you, and he's just crazy enough, it's quite possible that he would grab a handful of your balls and do a lot of damage before you're able to reach out and put that hook on him. He could jam his finger into your eye socket, or bite your nose off. He could follow the example of Mike Tyson and bite your ear. He could lean over and bite a chunk out of your thigh, or your forearm. It all depended on how far he wanted to go. In cases like that, it doesn't matter how skilled you were as an amateur wrestler, or how tough of a street fighter you are. I don't care how many hooks you know. There is no guaranteed defense against those variables.

Psychologically, a reputation can mean a lot. It wouldn't mean much to Lou Thesz — I understand that — but it means a lot to Joe Doe who spends his evenings drinking beer down at the local bar. The challengers hadn't been in the competitive situations that Lou and I had been in, so all the marks have to work with is the fact that I'm a mean mother.

At first, Gene and I worked out with the marks at the behest of old man Crockett. There was no money involved. We just volunteered to workout with them. Gene and I weren't the only two who did that. Harley Race, Buzz Sawyer, and Bob Roop did the same thing. Before turning pro, Bob wrestled in the 1968 Olympics and was the national AAU champion in 1969. He had been stretching marks for Eddie Graham, the wrestling promoter in Florida, but quit because Eddie would abuse the guys after Bob finished stretching them. When the mark got out of the ring, Eddie would coldcock the guy. Bob didn't like the fact that Eddie took advantage of people in that fashion,

so he left. That was one of the major differences between Bob and me. Bob didn't want to hurt anybody. Bob didn't believe in abusing anybody. I believed in abusing everybody — including Bob — at least verbally.

As I said, the people that Gene and I worked out with, most often, were marks who wandered into the wrestling office. However, in the early 1980s, Gene came up with a brilliant idea that allowed us to be the first to really capitalize on the workouts. Gene walked up to me one afternoon and asked, "Do you want to make some money?"

I could only come up with one answer to that question. "Sure!"

Gene told me that people walked up to him all the time, wanting to know how they could get into rassling. I always thought it kind of odd that people picked Gene. Gene never had two words to say to anybody, but he had all kinds of people approaching him. He started asking them, "Do you

have 400 bucks?" Some of them said yes, some of them said no. If they said they didn't have that much, he would ask them, "Well, how much do you have?"

They might say, "I've got three hundred." If that were the case, Gene would say, "Well, okay. I'll set you up for a trial workout. It'll cost you 300 bucks." He took whatever amount he could get them to cough up.

The first time Gene called me was on a Sunday. He said, "I've lined up some guys if you want to work out with them." He had scheduled a workout for the Charlotte Coliseum that afternoon, where the ring was already set up for a show that night.

I arrived at the Coliseum before Gene did. The one thing I distinctly remember is that he walked into the Coliseum with a gym bag and dropped it onto a table. He opened it up and said, "Look." It was full of money — cold, hard cash.

"How do you want to handle it?" I asked.

"There's the money. Do whatever you want to do with it."

"Gene, how about if we go fifty-fifty?"

"Fine," he agreed. I took the money from the gym bag and counted out $4,300 in cash. I was booking at the time and wrestling in main events, so I was making good money, but an extra $4,300 in cash for an afternoon workout wasn't something that I was going to turn down.

Gene had twelve wannabes lined up for the session and each one of them had paid Gene various sums of money for the privilege of working out. They all wanted to find out whether or not they had what it took to be in the wrestling business. As a rule, I was the one who worked out with them. Gene would do it on occasion, but for the most part, I took care of that while he kept everybody else occupied elsewhere in the

building. We didn't want the rest of the guys to see what was happening in the ring, so Gene would take eleven of them to the back end of the building, while I would get into the ring with the one who remained behind.

The hold I used most often with the marks was called the sugar hold. Not everybody calls it the sugar, but that's what I was taught. It's a terrible hold. It works all the time. The hold, which is like a reverse half nelson, is applied from behind. You raise both arms of your opponent overhead, with your arms wrapping around them from the outside and your hands placed behind their head. You crank their head forward and roll your weight onto their back and arms, shutting off their air supply. The blood pressure in the head shoots up so high that it will usually cause the blood vessels in the eyes to rupture.

The sugar hold works best on people who have a little bit of muscle, especially in their shoulders and arms. You can't use it on a woman, a thin guy,

or a pudgy guy. You need someone who has a good set of shoulders and is a little bit inflexible. At least it worked that way for me. I tried it with skinny guys and they got right out of it. Maybe Lou Thesz could have used it effectively on a woman or a skinny guy. I couldn't. That was something that always intrigued me. I'd like to know if Lou could have made it work.

But the sugar was deadly to the guys who had a good upper body, like all the football players who thought they were so tough when they were around us. You literally choke to death. You can't get any air. It's a sensation comparable to having someone grab your feet and pull you underwater. Most of the guys would panic, but once we seat that hold, there's nothing you can do except wonder, How long can I hold my breath? A few seconds later, you're thinking, Is this guy trying to kill me? Or, What's he trying to do? Does he have any idea how long I can hold my breath?

The sugar was a better hold to use with the marks

than Lou Thesz' verison of the double wristlock. Anatomically, it's an impossibility to use the double wristlock without permanently injuring the person you're applying it to. When you used the double wristlock, you had two choices — you either do it and ruin the guy, or you don't do it at all. It's like trying to drop a bomb on someone's head without hurting them. The double wristlock is guaranteed to leave you with serious injuries. On the other hand, you can put the sugar on a guy and he'll pass out, but he'll live another day without any real damage. I'm trying to make the point that you can't do a hold like the double wristlock and stop halfway. That's why I don't think Lou used it that often. I don't think Lou used the sugar, either. He had too much knowledge. There were a whole lot of other things that Lou used on me that compelled me to shout, "Damn! What are you doing? Let me go!"

Stu Hart used the sugar to put a lot of big, musclebound guys out. Of course, one of the side effects of the sugar is that the victims often pissed

or crapped in their pants. When you see that happen, or better yet, when you experience it, everything takes on a whole new meaning. You suddenly realize that there are things that can be done to you where you just can't tap out and say, "Okay, I quit! Okay, that's enough! I'm done." It doesn't happen that way.

Once I applied the sugar, I would really work it. The most effective thing I did with it was to take a mark to the edge of passing out, and then bring him back. In other words, as he began to go under, I'd ease up on the pressure and let him relax for a second. Just as he began to take a quick breath, I'd clamp down on the hold and push him forward again. It's the most miserable feeling you could ever have because you get panicky. The worst thing about it is, you can't do a thing about it. You can kick or do whatever you want to do, but you just can't do anything to get out of it.

I wasn't a National champion like Verne Gagne or Dick Hutton, but as I said, the people we

wrestled weren't that good. I was good enough to stay with a guy and mess around with him until he got himself into a position where I could put the sugar on him. I would work my way into it. The guy wouldn't have any idea that I was setting him up for it because he had never seen anything like that. If it had been Verne Gagne, he never would have let me get near it. I wouldn't have been able to do that with Hodge, Thesz, or anyone else in their class, either.

There was another benefit to the sugar. When you apply it, you still have one arm free. That was the beauty of it. While the guy was going in and out, I'd punch him in the face, just to daze him a bit. At the very least, I'd make his nose bloody, or I'd bruise the mouth a little bit. At that point, the guy is trapped in the sugar hold. He's hurt and he's scared. He has a bloody nose, a cut face, a busted lip, a black eye, or any combination of those four. He realizes that he is totally vulnerable. He realizes how utterly helpless he is. I could do anything to him that I wanted to do. I could

continue to put him out and he wouldn't be able to do anything to stop me. I could hook his leg and break it if I felt like it.

When I finally tired of the game, I would lean in close and whisper in his ear. "I want you to listen very carefully. I'm gonna let you go. When I do, I want you to run. Not walk! Run. Run back to the dressing room and get your belongings. You don't take a shower. You just grab your stuff ... then you come running out ... and you run out the door. And I don't ever want to see you again."

As I let go, I would say, "Okay ... run!"

Every one of those guys would rocket out of that ring. A few of them would slow down to a walking pace when they were a 100 feet or so away from the ring. At that point, I would start speaking softly, increasing the volume on each word. "Do I have to come ..." The guy would take off again at full tilt! I remember one guy who brought his wife, mother, dad, and some

friends. After I told him that I wanted him to leave, he ran like the demons of hell were nipping at his heels. As he ran into the dressing room, his friends and relatives came down from the stands, headed in his direction. Before they could reach the floor of the arena, he was already running through the door, with nothing more on his mind than getting out of the building. They were yelling, "Tommy, Tommy! Where are you going?"

He didn't hear them. He was already gone.

In the meantime, Gene would have the other wannabes doing a little bit of running, or sprints, or pushups, or calisthenics. They would be on the other side of the building, so they couldn't see what was going on. Occasionally, someone would get a glimpse of what was going on. When that happened, it was really difficult to get them into the ring.

"Wait a minute. You know, I think ..."

"Come on, come on! Get in the ring."

Later on, we got a little smarter. We realized that the best thing to do was to take them outside, so there was no opportunity for them to see what was going on in the ring. They couldn't hear anything, either. Usually, when I hooked a leg or an ankle, or even when I used the sugar, the mark would scream. Outside, the other wannabes were less likely to hear or see anything that might scare them off.

We went through that same scenario with the other eleven wannabes. I can remember a few times when we did that two or three weeks in a row. Generally speaking, though, it might take Gene a couple of weeks to get the ten or twelve guys lined up. That was how we found Don Kernodle. We were told that Don's friend was a karate something-or-other, but that didn't mean a thing to us. I used a simple crossface. I got behind him and scrubbed his nose and upper lip with my wrist bone, which is really painful.

I still think it was peculiar that people would approach Gene. Gene didn't talk to anybody, yet all of those people came to Gene to ask him about getting into the business. As far as I know, he didn't approach anyone. He just made it a point to be accessible to the fans at the matches and they approached him.

But what really amazed me was that those people would actually get into the ring with us. It took me a long time to figure that out, but I believe I have a logical understanding of their thought process. They were mired in the idea that everything in wrestling was put on. Even if they thought professional wrestling was all a shoot, or if they truly believed that we were the toughest guys on the planet, they couldn't even begin to imagine what it would be like to have their arm ripped out of their shoulder socket. That kind of thinking was completely beyond their comprehension. They couldn't imagine that anyone would break their fingers. They had no idea that there were holds, like the sugar, that could make

them pass out. They thought the sleeper was a bullshit hold. They didn't know there was a real sleeper hold that, if properly applied, would render them unconscious.

Most of them came to the workout thinking, What's the worst that could happen? Ole Anderson will just beat me. 1-2-3, I'm beat! Or — I'll just give up before it starts to hurt. No big deal. Easy! They thought that if they got into any kind of trouble, they would have all the time in the world to shout, "Oh. Oh! That's enough. Okay, I quit. I quit." They didn't realize that we might not be ready to quit when they were ready to quit. They thought the worst that could happen was that we would put them in some terrible hold, but before it began to hurt, they would say, "That's enough. That's enough. Let me go." What they didn't know was that most of the old-timers weren't going to quit until they were good and ready to quit. And usually, they weren't ready to quit until the poor mark was screaming at the top of his lungs and his voice was gone. The old-timers

all handled things that way. I don't know if you've ever had one of those old guys get hold of you, but until you're in a position where your body is literally screaming out loud, and your head is about to explode from the increase in blood pressure, you can't even begin to comprehend what they could do to you.

Not one of them knew what I had in mind for them. They didn't have any idea. Personally, I took the Karl Gotch approach. "Ven I wrestle you, I vill pack a lunch, because I vant to take aaalllll day!"

Later, when Gene and I were wrestling in Georgia, we held a few workouts, but not as many. We were running all over the state, so it wasn't as convenient. When we were in Atlanta, we wrestled the marks in the old Sports Arena, the building that Paul Jones owned. One day, Harley Race was torturing a guy who managed to scoot out of the ring and run out the exit door. Harley wasn't ready to quit, so he chased him down the street.

It wasn't uncommon for a guy to get into the ring and say something like that, "Take it easy on me." That was the worst thing one of the marks could say. I had reputed tough guys whisper things like, "You know. I'd just like to roll around a little bit. Would you take it easy on me?" I would just look at them and say, "For all I know, you might be good. I don't know what you do for a living, but whatever it is, I'm sure you're good at it. This is what I do, and I'm really good at it. You came in here to try and take my money. You'd better hope you can walk out of here today." I would then proceed to beat the hell out of them.

The guy would cringe and mutter, "Oh, my God!"

I remember Bob Roop wrestling a heavy-set kid who worked at the hospital as an orderly. Bob had him trapped in the sugar. The kid was crying and begging to be turned loose, so I told Bob, "Bob, don't let the guy go. Break a finger or something, but don't just turn him loose." Bob was really a nice guy. He absolutely hated to do that kind of

thing, but I loved it. I loved it. I told Bob, "Do it! If you don't, this guy is gonna come back one day and tell everybody that he can beat your fat ass."

"I don't think he needs it," Bob argued.

The guy was crying. "Oh, no! I don't need to have my finger broke. I won't tell nobody!"

I egged Bob on. "Look at him, Bob. He's a big kid. He's gonna tell everybody in town that he kicked your big, fat ass all over the ring. You'd better do something."

"Oh, no, Mr. Anderson! I don't have to have my finger broke."

"I think we can just let him go," Bob repeated.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Roop. I won't say nothin'."

That, by the way, was an example of how I abused Bob Roop. For the record, Bob is one hell

of a guy and a good friend — even if he does have a big, fat ass.

In my own experience, I remember one guy in particular. The other wrestlers got me all revved up by ragging me on, saying that he was going to kick my ass. We began tugging and pushing, and then I asked him, "Have you ever run the ropes?"

"Oh, yeah," he answered.

Apparently, he had run the ropes before. The first time you get into a ring and run the ropes, depending on what the ring is like, it's a little bit difficult. In Minneapolis, Verne used real ropes, which would stretch more than cable. As a result, they would throw you back into the ring with more force than the steel cables would. On the other hand, the steel cables hurt a little more when you hit them. It wasn't that bad in the Charlotte ring. I start running the ropes with him. We're criss-crossing. I went to give him a shoulder, but he was pretty quick. Actually, he was quicker than I

thought he was. He dropped down and I went flying. I landed on the mat with a thud. Gene and a couple of the boys were there, watching and laughing. That was enough horsing around for me. I punched the kid and broke his jaw.

A few minutes later, I was in the locker room when they brought the guy in and sat him down on the bench not too far away from me. I was a little remorseful. No, I take that back. I wasn't remorseful. I was thinking about the possibilities of a lawsuit. Luckily for me, he wasn't. He held his mouth and he could barely talk. "I don't know why you did that," he mumbled. "I was just trying to work." It turned out that he had been working in a few different places. He wasn't a bad kid at all, but I was just a prick who lost his cool when the guy made me look like a dumbass in front of the guys.

The week after that, we were set up with a guy from Greenville who came in with a manager. He was a big guy, about 315-pounds, 6-foot-3. I

hooked him in the sugar and had the guy close to passing out. During his lucid moments, he was screaming and hollering. "Please, please. I've got a wife and kids." I really felt bad about hurting the kid the week before, so I loosened up. Gene was watching and warned me. "You're screwing up, Ole."

I didn't agree. "Naaahh!" When I loosened up on him some more, Gene repeated himself, telling me I was making a mistake.

I whispered in the guy's ear. "Listen, I don't know what you do for a living. Whatever it is, I'm sure you do it better than I do, but this is what I do for a living. I don't want you to ever, ever, EVER ... tell someone you had a chance against me. If I let you go, I don't ever want to see you again, and I don't want you telling anybody that if you had worked out for another week, or six months, you could have come back and kicked my ass."

"No, no, no. I won't mention it to anyone," he

promised, so I let him go.

After the guy left, Gene said, "Ole, you screwed up. That one's gonna come back to haunt you." I shrugged it off because I honestly felt bad about the other kid. Four weeks later, we were in Greenville, South Carolina. Gene and I were in the ring, waiting for our opponents. We heard someone yell, "Ole Anderson, you son-of-a-bitch. I'll kick your ass." A comment like that wasn't anything unusual, but when I looked over at Gene, he was grinning. "Turn around and take a look," he said.

"Gene! Let's just worry about what we're doing." You can't pay attention to everybody that's yelling at you.

"Just take a look at the guy," he insisted.

Our opponents still hadn't made it to the ring, so I turned around. It was the guy that I had on the mat in Charlotte four weeks before. He actually came

down to the ring, but the cops stopped him. I jumped out and the cop said to me, "Ole, don't touch him. If you do, we'll have to arrest you. We won't have any choice."

The guy was standing behind the cops. "Yeah, let 'em hold me back. That's the way you guys do it, just like when you and your brother jumped me a few weeks ago."

Just like when my brother and I jumped him a few weeks ago?

Gene and I went on with our match. All the way back to the dressing room ... all the way out to the car ... Gene was going, "Boy, Ole. You sure scared him. You sure showed him who was boss." He just wouldn't let up on me. Gene was driving, so we got into his car. In Greenville, you had to leave the parking lot and circle around three blocks on one-way streets to leave the area. After making our second turn, we were driving along the side of the building. Who do we see walking on

the sidewalk? The big mouth.

"Pull the car over, Gene," I ordered, as I opened the door. When I got out, Gene drove away to avoid blocking traffic. Big Mouth was with his wife and another guy. The wife immediately started screaming. "I'm gonna shoot you, you son-of-a-bitch, Ole Anderson! You and your brother beat the hell out of my husband! You couldn't do it alone."

"Whoa! Wait a minute," I said. She had her hands in her coat pockets. I didn't know if she had a gun or not, so I grabbed hold of her wrists. When I pulled her hands out of her coat pockets, and I saw that she didn't have a gun, I let go of her. She kept yelling and screaming, but the guy didn't say anything. His friend didn't, either.

"Wait a minute," I said. "Just shut up for a second." When she finally calmed down, I said, "Just let me show you something. Let me prove something to you." She didn't say anything. I

looked at her and said, "Are you still taking advantage of the town drunks? Every wino in town talks about what a lousy blowjob you are. They only keep coming back for more because they hope you've learned how to do it better."

Well — she just exploded! After a few seconds, I continued. "Wait a minute. You're mad at me. When is your husband going to get mad at me and defend you? I'm alone. Gene is gone! It's you, your husband, and this guy. I'm outnumbered. You're mad, but when is your husband going to get mad? When is he going to step up and defend you? When is he going to fight for you?" I turned to look at him, and then looked back at her. "Now you know the truth."

At that very moment, like in a scene from a movie, Gene pulled up to the curb and I got into the car. As Gene drove off, I turned around and looked at them. She was yelling and hitting her husband on the chest. That was an eye-opener for her. He never said one word. It was a Paul

Harvey moment. "Now she knew the rest of the story."

Chapter 14
Fair Game

At one time or another, most of the wrestlers have been guilty of fighting with the fans. As a for-instance, when I first got into the business, we were in the St. Paul Auditorium. I don't know exactly what happened, but someone took a swing at Mad Dog Vachon, and then someone else stepped up and punched him. The cops immediately grabbed the guy. It was a big auditorium and there was an area on the main floor that was blocked by a wall. To get to the dressing room, you had to go through a door in the wall. Mad Dog walked through the doorway with the cops bringing the guy in behind him. Once they were out of sight of the people in the audience, Mad Dog turned to the guy and said, "You can't do that to Mad Dog." He proceeded to beat the hell out of the guy. The cops then grabbed the guy and ran him into a door, which was conveniently

closed and locked. They really messed him up. They finally found a door that would open and threw him out, shouting out after him, "If we see you here again, you're going to jail." That was my introduction to one of the boys getting involved with somebody on the outside.

In those days, people were of the opinion that if someone from the audience hit you, it was okay to do whatever you wanted to do to them. The worst mistake a fan could make was to get into the ring. If a mark stepped into the ring, or for that matter, if he just leaned through the ropes, he was considered fair game. If a mark came after you as you were getting out of the ring, he also was fair game. That attitude changed big-time in the late '60s. For the most part, the promoters wanted you to keep your match inside the ring, and they reminded you of that quite often. In fact, fighting with your opponent outside the confines of the ring was the biggest reason that altercations with the fans took place.

In Charleston, South Carolina, a fan cursed us and took a swing at me as Gene and I were walking out. At the time, we had those huge title belts that Nikita Mulkovich had made. I had my belt in my hand, so I reacted and smacked the guy in the face with it. About a month later, I got served with a lawsuit. The next time we went back to wrestle in Charleston, the cops told me that the guy was there and warned me to stay away from him. We dressed upstairs in Charleston, but there was a stage in the back of the building with a curtain where the wrestlers used to stand and watch the matches. Sure enough, as soon as I showed my face, the guy walked over to the stage and began to yell at me. I gestured to him and mouthed, "Come here." I was hoping to lure him a little closer. He didn't take the bait.

A few minutes later, I went to the ring and wrestled. After the match, the cops were escorting me back to the dressing room. As I walked down the aisle, the guy came up and got right in my face. He told me that he was going to sue me and

take me for every dime I had. Then he spit, hitting me square in the face with a big honker. I was really surprised when the cops grabbed him and asked me, "What do you want to do?"

"Bring him to the back," I said.

They brought him to the back, put us in a room off the stage area, and left us alone. When he realized that he was alone with me, the guy started backpedaling. I went nuts and lost it. He was just a little bit taller than me, so I grabbed him by the ears and pulled him down to his knees in front of me. I smashed his face into the radiator and really messed him up. I think the guy believed it was a prearranged deal between the cops and myself. Actually, it surprised me as much as it did him when they brought him back to me. The cops just didn't expect me to bang his head against the radiator. When he started yelling and screaming, the cops rushed back in. They put a baton under my chin and pulled until I let go of the guy. As the cops were taking us out of the building, I told the

guy that if he didn't drop the lawsuit, I would kill him. The cops then put us in separate squad cars.

As we stood in front of the desk sergeant, I knew I was going to jail, but when the sergeant asked the guy what happened, he said, "I fell down." I really believed that he thought I would kill him. When they asked if he wanted to press charges, he said, "No." The next day, the guy dropped the original lawsuit. That was one of two lawsuits in which I didn't have an attorney represent me — the only two lawsuits that worked out in my favor.

I was served with my first lawsuit in 1968 when I was in the Carolinas. A man climbed into the ring in Asheville, North Carolina and I clouted him. I was sued several weeks later, which I expected, and we appeared in court a year later. When I asked my attorney where the guy who was suing me was, he pointed to a man across the room. I remembered the man enough to know that the person I was looking at in the courtroom wasn't the man I hit. We decided to look into it a little bit

closer. Mind you, my attorney and his private investigator had been looking at the case for almost a year.

I had a book in which I used to make a note of every place I wrestled. I asked my attorney, "What date was this supposed to have taken place?" It turned out that the guy was claiming that I hit him on a certain date. When I looked at my book, I realized that I hadn't even been in the state of North Carolina on that particular date. Nobody had checked the date to be sure it corresponded with my schedule. For that matter, why would we check it? I punched somebody and I got served with a lawsuit, so I just assumed I was being sued by the guy I hit. Luckily, we realized that the lawsuit was bogus before court proceedings started. When we brought that information out, the case was dismissed. It cost me a bundle for those incompetent attorneys and they didn't do anything.

The wrestlers were prone to do all sorts of things to encourage some kind of interaction with the

fans. In the later years, Randy Savage was the most guilty of that. I used to get after him. That's when the promoters, myself included, began to stress, "Keep the match in the ring and don't go out on the floor. Don't yell at the people or trade insults back and forth."

I remember hearing people talk about the salty guys who were wrestling in Tennessee. One of the stories going around was that Buddy Fuller would fight anybody, but my understanding was, he got beat by just about everybody. The bottom line was, he probably couldn't beat anybody, but he had a lot of people fooled. He had people thinking he was the toughest SOB in the world, but on the few occasions when he did get into a fracas with people off the street, they knocked him on his ass.

Newton Tatrie wrestled for many years as Geeto Mongol. For a time, he promoted shows on weekends for Stu Hart. Tatrie booked me in a little town not too far out from Calgary. The matches were held in a hockey rink. For that

matter, every time we wrestled in Canada, we were in a hockey rink. I was working with the Christy brothers, Jerry and Bobby. After the match was over, I was stretched out on the ring apron. All of a sudden, several people attacked me, so I rolled off the apron and onto the floor. As I stood up, I saw three or four people standing around me. I wasn't going to waste any time with the niceties of diplomacy. I started throwing punches right back. I threw a right. One guy went down. I threw a left. Another one hit the floor. A third guy came at me. I dumped him on his ass. I knocked one more down before I was through. I left four guys on the floor as I walked back to the dressing room.

At the time, I was 25 years old, weighed 265 pounds, and was strong. I was full of piss and vinegar, so by the time I got to the back, I was really full of myself. "Did you guys see that? I threw a right and — boom! The guy went to the floor. All four of them were one-punch knockouts."

Newton Tatrie walked up and calmly said, "Yeah, you're pretty tough, all right. Those people you knocked down were all mentally retarded."

The group of people who were sitting at ringside had been brought in from a special needs school. If I had stopped for a second to look at them, I would have realized that they were retarded. I didn't pay any attention to the people who were attacking me, though. I just knew I was being attacked, so I was going to show them that they couldn't get away with it. I stood up and knocked them on their ass. I got ribbed about that for a long time.

Jack Brisco found himself in a situation in Savannah, Georgia. A mark walked right into the dressing room, which was just a big, open area. I was sitting 30 or 40 feet away from Jack and wasn't paying any attention. All of a sudden, the guy was flailing away at Jack. I don't remember the exact sequence of events, but Jack grabbed him by the hair and was able to punch him two or three

times before I ran over. I stopped Jack because I was so concerned about marks suing me, the promotion, the wrestlers, and whatever else. I got between them, hustled Jack out, and attended to the guy until the cops came in. Afterwards, I joked with Jack about it. "The guy has only been in wrestling for five seconds and he's already wrestling the world champion." The funny thing about it was that Jack didn't use one wrestling hold. He just punched the guy, which was very typical of the shooters. I saw a lot of fights between the wrestlers and the fans, but I never saw anybody use a wrestling hold. I never saw anybody take anybody down. I never did myself, either. Everybody just started punching.

There was a good reason for that. Ultimately, wrestling would be more effective because you could have a mark screaming for his life by using a simple hook or submission hold, but taking someone down onto the cement floor wasn't a smart idea. I did that one night and, in the process, banged up my knee and got a bad staph infection. I

could have lost my leg. Jack could have wrestled the guy, but he didn't want to take the guy down onto the cement floor because it might have caused as much injury to Jack as it did to the guy. If Jack had been on a mat, the sensible thing would have been for him to take the guy down, put him in a hold, a la Lou Thesz, and break his arm. But to get him into that position on a cement floor could have resulted in injury to Jack, too. That's why a lot of the guys punched, rather then wrestled.

The people who usually got involved in altercations were generally the wrestlers on top who had a lot of heat. I got sliced open by a fan in Greenville. I was stabbed several times during my career, but it was that Greenville incident that made national headlines. Gene and I both got cut by a fan in Roanoke. We had fans hit us with seat belts. I got clouted in Marietta by a fan with a motorcycle helmet. Black Jack Mulligan and Black Jack Lanza were cut with roofing knives in New York. The stories are endless.

First and foremost in my mind, especially after I got sued, was to get to and from the ring without touching anybody. There were many times that you got punched by someone as you walked through the crowd, but you never realized it. The problem with getting into hassles with the fans is that the deck is stacked against you. Every time I got sued, the guy had ambushed and punched me two or three times before I turned around and hit him. The newspapers didn't help my case. They all made it sound like I was the one who started the fracas. I was responsible.

One of the articles from the Greenville incident dated May 24, 1976, said, "79-year-old man stabs Ole Anderson. Witnesses say Ole Anderson kicked him when he was on the floor." Well, that's what the newspaper article says. Was he an old man? Yes, he was. I used to joke about it. "Yeah, but his knife was only six months old. If you average them out, the two of them were only 40 years old." However, the newspaper left you with the impression of a 79-year-old man who could

barely walk, was senile, and should have been in a retirement home. If that was the case, how did he manage to cut me?

The truth is, he didn't stab me. He slashed me. He cleaved me wide open, to the extent that I took more than 100 stitches in my chest. The other thing the newspaper conveniently forgot to tell anyone is that they thought I was going to die.

It began when a near riot took place — chairs flying everywhere. One guy came toward me with a chair held overhead. I told him, "Put that chair down or I'll shove it up your ass." That was when the old man stepped in and cut me. I instinctively grabbed my chest. I remember looking down at my chest and thinking, Oh, hell. I could hardly believe what I saw. My chest was laid wide open. The old man just stood there with his knife in his hand, staring at me. Chairs were still flying everywhere. It was just bedlam. It was one of those situations where you wish you could just start over. What I wanted to undo was being cut

because it really looked bad to me.

I don't know where the newspaper got their information, but it said I kicked the old man when he fell down onto the floor. That wasn't what happened at all. When I reached down and pulled my chest together with my left hand, I saw the old man standing in front of me, with the knife still in his hand, so I hauled off and punched him in the face with my right. That probably sent him to the floor, but I turned right around and headed for the dressing room. That was all there was to it. Kicking the old bastard was the last thing on my mind.

I walked towards the end of the building and called out to a security cop. "I've been cut bad. I have to get to a hospital."

The cop brushed me off and said, "Oh, come on."

I said, "Hey, listen to me. I have to get to a hospital right now."

Again, he said, "Come on, Ole."

"Look, you son-of-a-bitch!" When I took my hand away from my chest, he could see that it was opened up an inch-and-a-half or so. He took one look — and fell down. He actually fainted. I continued walking to the back and I sat down on a bench. Everybody else was running around in a panic.

"Is he gonna live?"

"He's cut bad!"

Everybody was talking like I wasn't there. Several of the guys walked over, including Timmy Woods and Dino Bravo, who we had worked with that night. Sandy Scott, the local promoter, came over to use the telephone, which was right above my head. Sandy was dialing and dialing and dialing. I remember the building manager saying, "That phone doesn't work." Sandy didn't seem to hear him, which

wasn't surprising. There were 20 or more people in that area, and every one of them was hollering and screaming. Finally, Sandy said something like, "This phone doesn't work." The building manager repeated himself. "Yeah, the phone doesn't work."

As I sat there, I began thinking about an incident that took place a few weeks prior to that. After a man in Charlotte had been stabbed, two ambulances showed up and the paramedics argued over who was going to take the guy to the hospital. While they argued, the man died. I had the strangest feeling that I was the star character in a Warner Brothers cartoon. I'm bleeding to death and they don't have a phone that works. The pretend cops faint at the sight of blood. I thought I was going to be joining the man who died up in Charlotte.

Three girls that we all knew came to the back — Jeannie, Peggy, and a third girl who was a nurse. I told them, "Get a few towels, then run to the front and fill them with all the ice they'll hold. Bring it

back and use it as a compress for my chest. Stand right here and hold that thing against my chest until the ambulance arrives, then go with me in the ambulance. Don't take any crap from anybody." I began to feel woozy, like I was going to go fall asleep. "No matter what else you do," I stressed, "keep the ice pressed against my chest."

When the ambulance arrived, they loaded me up. The girls weren't allowed to ride with me in the ambulance, so the attendant held onto the ice pack. Sandy shouted, "Go! Get him to the hospital," but the cops wouldn't let us go. They wanted to get the old man onto the ambulance — the same bastard who had stabbed me. They made me wait while they loaded him into the ambulance! I had to listen to him moan and groan all the way to the hospital.

When we arrived at the hospital, the first doctor who looked at me decided that he wasn't going to work on me, so they called another doctor. As I lay there on the table, I heard the old man, still

crying and moaning. I yelled out, "Shut up, you son-of-a-bitch! If you hadn't stabbed me, you wouldn't be here."

A few minutes later, I noticed two men standing at the foot of my bed. They introduced themselves as detectives. I asked, "What do you want?"

They said, "If the old man dies, we have to arrest you." I didn't even respond. I couldn't believe it. I guess the old man was in bad shape.

One doctor started to sew me up. After several stitches, the needle got dull, so it started pinching me. "How about using another needle?" I suggested.

"Don't tell me that hurt. I thought you were a big, tough wrestler," he joked.

I was cut from the center of my chest down to my left side. He was leaning across my chest from right to left, so I gave him a jab in the ribs. "Don't tell me that hurt," I said. "Get me a new

needle." He quit everything altogether and left. They had to send another guy in to finish me up.

The old man lived and proceeded to sue me. I didn't get an attorney. Instead, I made a personal visit. I told him that if he persisted in his lawsuit, I would countersue him, and we both knew the truth of the incident. We both knew that he stabbed me before I even thought about touching him. I told him, "I have a lot of people who will testify to the fact that they saw you holding the knife and they saw you stab me. I will countersue you and take everything you own."

He dropped the lawsuit.

I didn't have an attorney represent me in that case or in the Charleston, South Carolina incident — and they were the only times that I got out of the situation. I hired attorneys more than 40 other times, and in every one of those cases, they made sure I paid them in addition to a fine or whatever

the judgment was.

As a rule, if we were in a town that we went to on a regular basis, we had good security. We had very good police protection in places like Atlanta and Asheville, but even then, if you're in close proximity to the people who are at the matches, they'll find a way to get to you. The people are within arms reach of you as you walk back to the dressing room. The police could get distracted, or fail to notice the knife concealed in the hand of someone who was standing just a foot away from you.

On the other hand, if we were at a spot show in some podunk town, the local security would be laughing and having a good time with the locals. Some of them spent all their time trying to beat the guys to the arena rats. If someone stood up and brandished a machine gun, the security reaction would most likely be, "Come on, Fred. Put the machine gun away and sit down." They acted like the show was a

carnival. They treated our security like it was a big joke. Therefore, you didn't get the protection that you need.

I'm saying all this just to impress upon you the idea that, if a guy had a brain in his head, he would do anything in his power to avoid any violent interaction with the fans that might come up. I always told my guys, "If you get punched by somebody, just act like it didn't happen. Just keep on walking." That's what I did. I never turned around to say anything to anybody.

If you need any more proof that what I say is true, then consider this. I asked a judge one time, "What would you propose I do to prevent that from happening?"

He told me, "I would suggest that you have the policemen surround you when you walk to and from the ring."

So, that's what I did. I had a cop hold my right

arm and walk on my right side. Another cop held my left arm and walked on my left side. I had a cop in front of me and a cop behind me. The people still punched and kicked me. That's not too hard to believe. How many cops do you think surrounded John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan when they were the President of the United States? They had the best security in the world, but someone found a way to get to both of them.

As hard as it is to believe, even when I was surrounded by the police, I still got sued. If someone slipped and fell, they made it out to be my fault. What else can you do?

Chapter 15
Early Retirement

In September 1970, I quit the wrestling business and went home to Minnesota. I received a minor injury during a match. At the time, it didn't seem like it was going to be a big deal, but I told people that I got hurt and had to quit the business, which was a half-truth. I had also been experiencing occasional blackouts and had even been knocked out in the ring on a few occasions. I wasn't aware of it, but Gene told me that I would babble and act incoherent at times. The blackout problem wasn't a major influence on my decision to quit, though. I had just turned 28 years old and my first son was due to be born in November. In addition, my dad was thinking about getting out of the bar business and had offered me a partnership. "If you want, come on up and I'll let you buy in," he said. My first thought was, I'm only 28 years old. If it doesn't work out, I'm young enough that I can go

back to wrestling. If I wait until I'm 35 and I get hurt, the opportunity might not be there. I might as well give it a try. So I went back to work for my father with plans to eventually assume ownership of his restaurant.

The building my dad's business was in wasn't a huge place. The bar, which was shaped like a horseshoe, was located on one end of the building. The other end was strictly dining area. Total seating for the bar and the dining area was about 160 people. In-between were bathrooms and a hallway on one end, and a kitchen on the other. It took a lot out of a man to run that business. In fact, I think the stress is what killed my father at a young age. He was just 62 when he died. My mother didn't reach 61. The workload took a toll on me, too. The blackouts began to occur more frequently. If I turned around too quickly, I would lose my balance. In March 1971, I was working on an addition to a trailer I owned and I fell over backwards. It took every bit of strength I could muster just to crawl into the trailer

and pull myself up onto the bed. I woke up at four o'clock the next morning with the world spinning around me and I puked until there was nothing left in my stomach. I was so dizzy that I couldn't even crawl on my hands and knees. If I tried to stand up, the world would start to spin and I would fall to the ground.

After spending a week in an Amery, Wisconsin, hospital, I was diagnosed with Meniere's disease. Meniere's disease is the name given to a medical condition of unknown origin and unknown cause. The four symptoms of Meniere's are (1) tinnitus, (2) fluctuating, progressive, low-frequency hearing loss, (3) a sensation of fullness or pressure in the ear, and (4) periodic episodes of vertigo or dizziness.

I couldn't walk for weeks. I couldn't even crawl. I felt like my insides were exploding. My heartbeat and blood pressure were both over 200. By the time April rolled around, I was so miserable that I had thoughts of killing myself—

one of the few times in my life where some people thought that I had a great idea. I had those feelings all the way into May, but I hung on and I gradually began to get better. The dizziness didn't go away, but I got to a point where I could walk for short distances. I had been so dizzy and nauseous for seven weeks that just being able to stand up was like being out on a picnic. I still couldn't make quick turns or stand up too quickly without feeling dizzy for 30 seconds or more. As soon as I was able to walk around in a normal fashion, I went right back to work in my dad's bar and restaurant.

The effects of Meniere's come back to me now and then, but they are very mild compared to what I had before. I can live with it now. I still have to be careful when I stand up because I get dizzy for fifteen seconds or so. It also hits me when I lay down. I learned that if I bend over slightly before I turn around, I don't get as dizzy. At least, I haven't yet, but there have been times when I've lost my balance enough to make me stagger. A few years ago, I talked to a doctor to see if they know more

about Meniere's than they did in 1971, but he told me they still don't know what causes Meniere's or how to treat it. I thought it might be from the bumps and punches I took in the ring, but I was told that men and women in everyday life, who don't get physically abused, also suffer from Meniere's.

In June 1971, I got a phone call from Leo Garibaldi, a former wrestler who was booking Florida at the time. I had the opportunity to be around Leo when he booked the Carolinas. He really impressed me. Leo had a sharp mind for creative finishes and I really liked his ideas. They were so different from the ideas that George Becker and Johnny Weaver, Crockett's former bookers, came up with. Leo's finishes always had some reasoning behind them. Leo, along with Eddie Graham, guaranteed me 500 bucks a week, no matter where I was on the card. I was absolutely stunned when they made that offer, because in those days, nobody got guarantees from promoters. My dad was there when the call came in. When I hung the phone up, he asked, "What

was that about?" After I told him, he said, "You need to decide whether you're going to stay in the bar business or go back to wrestling." That's exactly what I did. I got up the next morning and left for Florida. My dad sold the business two months later.

Chapter 16
Broads and Midgets

Eddie Graham controlled the Florida territory. He used to say, "I like to feature wrestling." Eddie was a real student of wrestling, or as he would put it, a student of "holts."

"Get a holt."

Eddie did his best to make wrestling appear as legitimate as it could possibly be. To begin with, he brought a lot of great talent into his territory. Don Curtis was a salty, old wrestler. Dickie Murdoch and Ronnie Garvin were good. Dick Slater was good when he started out.

Eddie was the only guy I knew who went into depth on every match. When you sat down with Eddie before your match, he had a finish prepared

that would last 30 minutes. I talk about not rehearsing things, and then I catch myself. We didn't rehearse anything, but Eddie did, in fact, have a finish prepared that would last 30 minutes. Nobody ever did everything right down the line the way he laid it out. When you went back to the office, Eddie would ask, "Did everything go all right?" Of course, everybody would say, "Oh, yeah, yeah." We probably had it close, but as far as doing it exactly like Eddie laid it out — sometimes we didn't.

That brings to mind something else that I learned early on in the business. If Eddie didn't go to a town, he might ask you how the matches went, so you would give him a brief rundown. Verne and Wally Karbo did the same thing to me when I first started. They would ask, "How did this match go," or, "How did the people react to so-and-so's match?" Of course, I would tell them what I thought. I was so green that I didn't realize that they were asking me to stooge on the other wrestlers. I was too dumb to realize that my

answers were going to implicate the guys in the match they were asking about. For instance, they might ask, "Well, how long did that match go?"

I might say, "Oh, I don't know for sure, but it couldn't have been much more than four or five minutes." Of course, the guys in the match may have been expected to go 20 minutes, so that got them into trouble. I didn't realize it, though, and Verne and Wally knew that I didn't realize it. That was why they asked me and not the other 20 guys in the territory.

Eddie was a lot like Verne — always thinking about how the people would react to his ideas. For the most part, people did react to his ideas in the way he wanted them to react. In some cases, you can do something spectacular, but you don't get the desired reaction from the people. A talented booker should be smart enough to improvise. Eddie was one of the few promoters I knew who could lay out an idea, but also knew how to improvise when the situation called for it.

I'm getting off the subject, but even though Eddie liked to feature wrestling, this is what he told me about the freaks and geeks. Eddie said, "I like to feature wrestling. I like to keep it on the mat. I like to make it look like a shoot." But he went on to say, "However, from time to time, it's good to have something for the fans to compare the shoot to." That's when he would have somebody like his partner, Buddy Fuller, bring in Doink the Clown, or the broads, or the midgets. Eddie knew that Buddy was going to do all kinds of goofy stuff, but he would let Buddy take the book for a month. Don't kid yourself. Even when he turned the book over to someone else, Eddie kept a close eye on everything. When things began to get a little out of hand, that's when Eddie would step back in. He would be re-energized and he would go back to doing something that resembled real wrestling. He would say, "Okay, let's get back to Jack Brisco and Dory Funk," which again, to me, were some of the greatest matches I had ever seen. But Eddie would have the Sheik on the same card. I'm talking about the real Sheik — Eddie

Farhat. The Sheik was the farthest thing away from wrestling that you could get, but what they would do was bury him on the card. They would put him somewhere in the middle.

Eddie might have one cartoon match, but they weren't all cartoons. Eddie tried to book a card that was appealing to everybody in some way, shape or form. Realizing that people occasionally needed a little bit of relief from the serious side of wrestling, he would periodically feature talent like Andre the Giant and Haystack Calhoun. We also used the midgets and the girls for that reason, but to me, they were poor representations of what I felt wrestling should be. Is the fact that we used the girls and midgets a contradiction of everything I say we stood for? Well, when you eat nothing but steak for weeks and weeks on end, you get the urge to eat a thick, greasy hamburger once in a while. It's just a change from the monotony.

When Buddy Fuller ran things, though, the matches were all cartoons. Don't get me

wrong. People like Jack Brisco and Dory Funk were going to have a serious wrestling match no matter what Buddy said, but for the most part, Buddy brought his own talent in from Tennessee. When I first got into the business, Verne told me, "You never want to go to Tennessee."

"Why wouldn't I want to do that?" I asked.

"They don't have anything down there that you'd want to be a part of," he answered simply. I didn't understand what he meant by that, but I found out years later.

The only time I wrestled in Tennessee in the old days was when Crockett sent me, Gene, Johnny Weaver, and Art Nelson to Bristol, Tennessee. Gene and I stood outside the dressing room and watched the semi-final match, which featured Ron and Don Wright against another team. I had never seen anything like it in my life. Thirty other wrestlers got involved in the

action. The cops jumped into the ring and chased the Wrights up one end of the stands, and then chased them down the other end. The cops were hitting them over the head with their billy clubs. I could have sworn I was watching an old Keystone Cops movie. One of the Wright brothers picked up the microphone and told everybody that the cops couldn't keep them in jail. It was the most bizarre thing that I had ever seen. It also seemed like the fans were smart to the business because they all seemed to be participating in the match in one way or another. There must have been 50 people promenade through the dressing room during the course of the evening.

"Hi, I'm the masked Zebra Kid."

"I'm Freddy, the Wonder Boy."

They were all off-the-wall guys who looked like they had just been smartened up yesterday.

As I watched that match, I asked Gene, "What the

hell is this?" I wanted to know what was going on because we had to follow that match. I was really concerned because Gene and I were in the main event against Johnny Weaver and Art Nelson, and watching Art Nelson wrestle was as exciting as watching grass grow. After we wrestled for five minutes or so, the people began to shout things like, "Come on! We wanna see some rassling!" Those people couldn't spell the word wrestling, much less say it correctly. "We wanna see some rassling," which translated meant, when was Weaver and Nelson going to dump a can of paint over our heads? I couldn't wait to get out of there.

To my way of thinking, Tennessee was doing Vince's nonsense years before Vince began doing Vince's nonsense. To put it another way, Nick Gulas, the promoter in Tennessee, was guilty of being New York before Vince McMahon was New York. We had a referee in Charlotte named Sonny Fargo. They used him in Tennessee as Roughhouse Fargo. He acted like an inmate who had escaped

from an insane asylum. I know they were drawing big money with Sonny in Tennessee, but it was a total cartoon.

And where else but Tennessee could you draw a dime with Jerry Jarrett? As a promoter, Jerry had a hell of a mind for wrestling, but Eddie brought him into Florida in 1970. At 160, maybe 170 pounds, where would he fit in with the guys who were down there at the time — people like Jack Brisco, Dick Murdoch, and Mr. Wrestling. We were told to take it easy on him. If we didn't like him, that was tough sh–-. We couldn't beat him up just because we didn't like him. At the time, I didn't know who Jerry was, but we were told that he was a promoter in Tennessee, so we had to be careful with him. I don't know how many of the guys would have relished the opportunity to kick Jerry's ass, but I had never worked in Tennessee, so I didn't have an opinion one way or the other. The only thing I thought when I saw him was, How in the hell can this little squirt be a wrestler? Jerry was very smart and had a good

mind for the promotion end of the business. It just bothered me to imagine a 170-pound, anemic-looking guy being in the main event.

In later years when I was doing the booking, I used the girls and the midgets on occasion, but I didn't like it. If you were trying to present wrestling as a shoot, it was impossible for a girl or a midget to be involved. I'm sure that the girls and midgets may have drawn some money at one time, but in my day, they were there primarily for comic relief. I would guess most of the old-time promoters looked at it that way. In my opinion, if they draw money, then I'm all for it, but I just didn't think there was a big spot for them. By the same token, I felt just like Eddie, Verne and anybody else did. It was a little diversion. The only request I made of the girls and the midgets was that they didn't abuse the referee. I didn't like anyone to make jokes at the referee's expense, or use the referee in a way that made him look like a clown. If the girls and the midgets could have a halfway decent wrestling match, I was all for it.

I used the broads on TV now and then in the hope that we'd get a blip on the ratings. Moolah used to call me on a regular basis. "Oh, Ole, dear. Can you get some bookings for my girls?" Most of the time, I was able to work something out. On one occasion when I brought her in to work on our television show, I said, "Listen, Lillian. I don't want you fighting outside the ring. I don't want you using any foreign objects. I don't want you messing around with the referee. I just want you to have a straight wrestling match." She did exactly what I said and kept it in the ring — for about two seconds. Then she threw her opponent out of the ring, picked up a garbage can, and pounded her opponent with it. As if that wasn't enough, she stuffed the girl into the can and then hit the referee. It was complete nonsense. I was so mad. After the match, I whipped the door open and barged into the room where she was dressing.

"Dammit, Lillian. I thought I told you to ..."

I didn't get any further. She got right in my face

and proceeded to give me a tongue lashing that would have made a sailor cringe. I just turned around and walked out. We didn't use Moolah that often, so she could do things like that and get by with it. Of course, I didn't like double standards, but that was one that I fell for. If the guys did what Lillian did, I would have fired them. I couldn't fire the girls because they were only there for a few days, or a week at the most. Eight months later, Lillian called me again. "Ole, darlin'. I have to get the girls some work." I would put it all aside and book her girls.

I didn't use a lot of the girls, but Moolah was one of the better ones. Penny Banner and Joyce Grable were good, too. One of the boys fell in love with one of the girl wrestlers. I won't mention her name, but she was a good-looking girl. They had some fun in the back seat during their trips up and down the road. Two days after their little affair started, she wouldn't talk to him. Her heart had been stolen away by another wrestler — another girl wrestler. I'll never forget what the guy said

when he found out about it. "Jeez, what a downer. Another broad took my girl away."

Vivian Vachon always wanted to ride with Gene and me because she felt like we were the only ones who weren't trying to hit on her. She was an attractive girl and interesting to talk to, but if I ever contemplated having a sexual relationship with her, all I could see in my mind was her brother Maurice Vachon's face. That would turn that part of it off. I'll never forget the first time she rode with us.

"Can you pull over?" she asked. "I have to pee."

Gene said, "Okay, there's a gas station about five miles up the road."

"Oh, just pull over," she ordered.

Gene pulled onto the shoulder of the road and she opened the door. She didn't want to walk out into the woods, so she squatted right there by the door. Of course, when the car door was open, the

interior lights were on, but that didn't bother her in the least. She hunkered right there next to the seat, pissing the beer out. When she finished, she stood up, pulled her pants up, sat down, and we drove away.

Vivian fell in love with Les Wolfe, a guy who wrestled as Buddy Wolfe. Les, Lars and I all went to St. Cloud State College. Les was really a nice guy. I don't know what happened to him after he left the Carolinas. I heard he was making furniture out of driftwood or something. He was really talented in that respect. He was an easy-going guy and a decent amateur wrestler, but he was so easy-going that he almost lacked personality, which is essential in the wrestling business. Vivian was killed in 1991 when she was hit by a drunk driver. She was only 40 years old.

I did an angle with the girls in 1980. On the surface, I wasn't crazy about it, but I came up with an idea that I thought might draw some money. I booked Joyce Grable and Judy Martin into a one-

night tournament for the National tag team title and gave them a few minutes of air-time to do an interview. "We know we can't beat all of the men wrestlers, but we've been wrestling for years and we think we're pretty tough. We just want an opportunity to wrestle and give an accounting of ourselves. At least give us a chance to see what would happen." It was an idea similar to the tennis match between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs in 1973. Billie Jean beat Riggs in the exhibition that was billed as the Battle of the Sexes. I used that as an example. I was just trying to create a little interest. Of course, I had the girls lose to Jerry Roberts and Steve O in the first round of the tournament. If I had put the girls over, I would have had to go out and hang myself.

When Verne heard that I put the girls in the tournament with the men, he was really ticked off at me. He called and said, "Boy, talk about exposing the business. How in the hell can the girls wrestle with the men?"

"Jeez, Verne," I replied. "That's nothing compared to all the goofy stuff that's been done in this business."

The promoters all used the midgets because they provided a little bit of comic relief, a little diversion. I'm the one who brought Roger Littlebrook [Lord Littlebrook] in with Jack Victory and Rip Morgan in the early part of the '90s. The business was already out of control, so at that point, I didn't really care what we did. I put Victory and Morgan together with Littlebrook as their manager. I had an idea for them, but I couldn't tell you what it was now. The three of them were nice guys, but whatever my little idea was, it just didn't work. In fact, it never came close to working.

We were merciless to the midgets. We used to pull all kinds of ribs on them, like dropping them off a mile away from the arena. That was tame. Some of the guys were really bad, but we had fun with guys like Fuzzy Cupid and Little

Brutus. The thing that I remember the most about Fuzzy Cupid was that he had such bad breath. He used to lean over the front seat when he talked to us.

One night in Miami, Ronnie Garvin and I brought Little Brutus with us. We parked in the double-decker parking garage. Little Brutus had a suitcase that he could barely see over when he set it down. The clothing and personal items that he needed for a year were in that suitcase. Ronnie and I were very adamant. "Listen, when our match is over, we're getting out of here. We'll meet you back at the car. If you're late, you'll be walking back to Tampa."

After the show, Ronnie and I left the dressing room and ran for the car. Of course, the midgets have short legs, so Little Brutus couldn't keep up with us. We got to the car first and drove to the other side of the parking deck. Brutus couldn't remember exactly where the car was parked, so he was wandering around the top deck looking for

us. I got out of the car and looked around. "Where is he, Ronnie?" I said loudly. I could see Brutus' little head bobbing up and down as he ran. When he was 50 feet away, I said, "I don't see him, Ronnie." He hadn't seen us yet, but he broke out into a dead run in the direction of my voice. We got back into the car and drove to the other side of the parking lot. I knew where Brutus was, so we let him get within 50 feet of the car again. I got out and looked around again. "Dammit, Ronnie! The little bastard isn't here." We drove off again. By the time we let him catch up to the car, he was exhausted.

We did so many mean things to the midgets. Some of the guys would scare them by telling them that they were going to stop and screw them. Like, how much fun could that be ...? We also dropped them off on Alligator Alley, a stretch of highway that was infested with snakes and alligators. We did that one night and drove down the road a few hundred feet. It was funny to watch them run. I didn't reserve that particular treat just

for the midgets. Sometimes, the boys got that treatment, too. Ronnie Garvin doesn't let anything bother him, but he was a little worried one night when I drove away after he got out of the car to take a leak. Neither of us knew that a wild pig had her babies just 20 feet away. Those pigs are pretty ferocious if someone disturbs them, so Ronnie ran like hell to get back to the car.

On the other side of that coin, you had the super heavyweights — Haystack Calhoun, Man Mountain Mike, and Haystack Muldoon. Muldoon was a cheap imitation of Haystack Calhoun. I hated working with Muldoon because he didn't shower. He would splash cologne on himself after he finished wrestling. Gene and I worked with Muldoon one night in a little town in Virginia. We were going to dump him over the top rope, so as we hoisted him over it, I came to the realization that he was perfectly balanced. Rather than dump him over, I said, "Wait a minute, Gene. Let's just keep him right here." The top rope was under his chest, so it didn't take a whole lot of effort on our

part to keep him balanced there. He flailed his arms and kicked his legs a little, but we had him. He wasn't going anywhere. We kept him on the rope for a minute or two. Pretty soon, he quit moving, so I told Gene, "The fun is over. Let's dump him." We dumped him over the top rope and he hit the floor like a ton of manure. Splat! When the referee checked on him, Muldoon was out cold. The rope across his chest had cut off his air passage and caused him to pass out. If we had held him a little longer, we might have killed him.

Haystack Calhoun got mad at me one night. He used to do a move where he gets you in the corner, and then jumps and plants his big ass on your back. He squashes you. He did that to me, so his ass was on my shoulders and his legs were on both sides of my neck. He was supposed to weigh around 600 pounds. At that time, I used to do a 640-pound squat. I stood up with him. He was upset because his gimmick was that nobody was supposed to be able to do that. Of course, Bruno Sammartino did that in New York years earlier,

but Bruno was the only one who was credited with having done that.

The other fat guy I didn't like was Chris Taylor. He wrestled in the Olympics in 1972. He was a wrestler. He had moles on his neck that were as big as my thumb. He didn't shower, either. He just wiped himself off with a towel and left.

Promoters today will tell you that wrestling doesn't sell. It's not that wrestling doesn't sell anymore. It's the fact that nobody knows how to sell wrestling. For that matter, nobody knows how to wrestle. Nobody who came into the business in the last 20 years has any concept of how wrestling works. You have to remember that with Eddie Graham, it was wrestling, wrestling, wrestling. Verne Gagne felt the same way. The first match is a first match, the second is a second, the third is a third. If there's going to be anything special, we'll call for it and program it into your match. Otherwise, you just go out there and you

wrestle.

It's my opinion that realistic wrestling can still hold the interest of the people if there's a little bit of crap thrown in. But if the entire match is crap, it's no good. I honestly believe that the television ratings today will continue to go south because the entire business is built around crap.

Getting back to Florida, though, Eddie would feature different levels of matches that featured wrestling, and then he would have one that was just a cartoon. The Sheik gave them a little excitement. Haystack Calhoun gave them something a little different, a little cartoonish. Then they introduced the finale of the night — Jack Brisco versus Dory Funk Jr. Jack and Dory had a wrestling match that was almost impossible to tell from a shoot.

Florida was amazing. I never saw so many wrestlers as I did when I walked into the Florida dressing room. There was more than 20 guys

sitting in there. I thought I was in the audience. I even remember asking, "Is the audience sitting in here, too?"

Someone shot back, "This is just the heels' dressing room. There's another one just like it on the other side."

They would have 20 to 30 wrestlers on a card. We only had 12 to 14 in Georgia. I had a hard time understanding that, but Eddie was taking care of me pretty well. I was just a jabroni — a young, inexperienced wrestler — but I was getting my 500 bucks no matter how many people were on the card.

I was featured in a few main events. Eddie built me up for a match with Jack Brisco for the Florida heavyweight title by booking me in handicap matches against two wrestlers. For the most part, though, I was scheduled midway on the card. I was happy with the money, but I adopted a little bit of a bad attitude while I was there. If I rode with

someone else, I would get to the show and leave when they did, but when I drove myself on the short trips, I would consistently show up a few minutes before the matches began. I would put my gear on, do my match, and go home immediately afterwards. I had never done that before and I never did afterwards, but that place was such a zoo that I couldn't wait to get away from it.

I had a match with Robert Fuller while I was there. Robert was Buddy Fuller's son. At the time, I weighed around 275 pounds and I was quite strong. I could bench press 450 and squat more than 600. We were at a little spot show and I was going to do the job, so I had him use a top wristlock, a submission hold. You have to picture this. Fuller was skinny. He was on the end of my arm with the hold. I would start to scratch my head, and then suddenly "realize" that Robert was hanging onto that arm, so I'd drop my arm down and scratch my head with the other hand. I then walked around the ring, swinging him around on my arm. I finally conceded the match. To me, it

was a joke. Of course, it wasn't good for the town, but putting me in the ring against Robert Fuller wasn't good for the town, either. I thought, What's the matter with these bookers? If the bookers had any sense, they would realize that the fans were sitting there thinking, Hey, Ole Anderson's arm is bigger than Robert Fuller.

Later that week, I really got under Buddy's skin. "Buddy, I finally figured out how to become a star in this business. First of all, I'll tie a long rope around my neck and hang myself from a tall tree. I'll hang there until my body stretches out to almost 7-feet tall. After that, I'll quit eating, lose about 130 pounds, and get myself down to about 150 pounds. Then I'll change my name to Ole Fuller."

As Buddy began to sputter, I added, "Oh, there's one other thing I have to do if I want to be a Fuller."

Buddy knew I had another insult ready, but he

couldn’t help asking, "What else do you have to do?"

"I have to forget everything I ever knew about wrestling,"

Of course, that didn’t get over too well with Buddy. It didn’t get over with some of the other guys, either. They just sat there, pretending to be pieces of furniture, wondering where and when the axe was going to fall. You could almost hear them thinking out loud, Boy, Ole. You’re digging your own grave.

In January 1972, old man Crockett came down to visit. He asked me, "Ole, when are you comin’ home? You know you’ve always got a home in the Charlotte territory." That was the second time he told me that. I was pleasantly surprised because at that point, I really didn’t have any idea of where I was going to go. All I knew was that I was ready to leave Florida. One month later, I was back in the Carolinas.

Chapter 17
Back to the Carolinas

I took Jim Crockett up on his offer and moved back to Charlotte in February 1972. Until I bought a house there later that year, I lived in an apartment below Bill Bowman, another wrestler, and his wife Anne.

Crockett kept a tight lid on his territory. He didn't want any difficulty from anybody. He had everybody in that territory worried about losing their job. I was the only one who would speak my mind. Jim would walk in and say, "Ole, I just bought this new suit and tie. What do you think of it?" I'd say, "It looks like crap!" The guys in the dressing room would get fidgety and look at the floor, as if they wished they were anywhere but there. I'd look around, act surprised, and say, "Well, it does." Jim wouldn't talk to me for the next half hour, and then I'd smooth it over by

telling him, "All right, Jim. I have to admit that it does look pretty good."

"Oh, well thanks, Ole!"

Everybody thought that Jim Crockett Sr. was a genius. He may have been a genius in many ways, but when it came to the business, I found out that he didn't know anywhere near as much as people gave him credit for knowing. At the television station, he would ask what we were going to do and what we were going to use for finishes. Every so often, I would feed him finishes that were absolutely ridiculous — finishes that made no sense whatsoever. I did it just to see what kind of a reaction I'd get from him. He would just say, "Okay," like the ideas made sense. But they didn't! I concluded one of two things from that. Either he wasn't listening, which was a possibility, or he really didn't understand what I told him. I honestly believe it was the latter reason.

The reason everyone thought old man Crockett was a genius was because they weren't smart enough to know what his real strength was.

Jim Crockett was a master interrogator. He was a master at making everybody believe that he knew everything that was going on. In a lot of cases, he did. If you had been out drinking that night, he would probably know about it. However, if he didn't know about it, he had a method of finding things out. All he had to do was call one of the guys into his office and ask, "Okay, do you want to tell me your story?" Since the guys were always certain that Crockett already knew exactly what was going on, they would tell him everything that had happened during the previous 24 hours. Jim would act like he already knew everything that he was being told, but he continued to listen so the guy had an opportunity to cleanse his soul by telling the truth. Jim might not know anything about anything, but they would keep talking and talking. Pretty soon, Jim knew everything there was to know.

He did that with a lot of the boys. He would get someone in front of his desk and say, "All right. Do you want to tell me about last night?"

The wrestler didn't know how much Crockett already knew, so he would spill his guts. When he finished, Crockett would pause for a second and let the silence linger, and then he would say, "And is that all?"

The wrestler would start right back up. "Well, no ..."

When the wrestler finished for the second time, Crockett would pump him once more. "I'm going to ask you one more time. Is that the end of it, or was there something else?"

"Well, Mr. Crockett ...." Blah-blah-blah-blah-blah.

One time I asked a guy who had talked to Crockett. "Why did you tell him anything?"

"He already knew!"

"He didn't know anything until you told him."

Crockett's method of running things was to have everybody report to him — the wrestlers, the building managers, the police. He had the police and the important people in the town in his pocket. For the most part, old man Crockett had all the wrestlers in his pocket. Everybody was afraid to do anything because they knew Jim Crockett would find out about it. Angelo Martinelli was his chief stooge, but there were a lot of people who told Crockett everything he wanted to know. They realized that Jim Crockett was their bread and butter.

I learned a valuable lesson when we got screwed on a payoff in Asheville, North Carolina. They were doing an average gate of $1,100 to $1,200 each week, but we had a $2,000 house in Asheville that night. The tickets sold for one to two bucks a person, so a $2,000 house was more

than 1,000 people. Everybody in the dressing room thought we were getting screwed on the payoff, so everyone agreed to show up at the office the next morning at ten o'clock to talk to Crockett about the situation.

When I walked into Crockett's office the next morning, he greeted me like an old friend. "Ole! How can I help you?"

"Oh, I'll just wait for the other guys to get here."

I was the only person who showed up! Little did I know that old man Crockett had already been informed about what was going on. After making me sweat for a half hour or so, he said, "It doesn't look like the other guys are going to be here. What's the problem?"

I told him.

He looked at me and asked, "Do you like it here?"

"Yeah."

"Are you making money here?"

"Yeah."

Then it dawned on me. That was in 1968. I had only been in the business for a little more than a year. I had only been in the territory for a few months. I remember thinking, Yeah, I do like it here. I am making money here. I realized that I had better shut my face (which is probably one of the few times in my life that I did that) and count my blessings. I left his office. That was the end of that.

Jim Crockett also was a superstitious guy. He didn't like anyone opening an umbrella inside a building. On a rainy day, I would act like I was trying to open my umbrella while I was standing in his office. I would start fussing. "Dammit! This umbrella is stuck! Why can't I get this thing open?" He would be watching me closely. I had the attention of everybody else in the office, too. I did a lot of nonsense like that, but I think Mr.

Crockett liked me for it.

While I was in Florida, Gene had been teamed up with Art Nelson, but Crockett put us back together when I returned. Johnny Weaver and Rip Hawk were the bookers at the time. Weaver and Hawk both did things by the book. Later on, when I learned more about the business, I realized that they did a good job, even though their ideas were archaic. They made money for themselves and they made money for Crockett. On the other hand, although the territory had good moments, it wasn't doing the business it could have been doing. That fact would be validated in the months ahead.

Johnny Weaver's problem was that he relied on a book of finishes that he had accumulated over the years. If he needed an idea for something to do in a match, he would pull the book out and try to find a finish. Eddie Graham told me one time, "If you have to write an idea down, you don't know what you're doing. You should be creating something new every night." Weaver would send pages and

pages of finishes to our dressing room, stuff that he had written down centuries before when his partner was George Becker. You couldn't read it all in 30 minutes. The ideas were old and not very well thought out. "November 26, 1964. George grabs a chair. I push Swede Hanson toward George. George hits Swede over the head with the chair and knocks him out. I cover him." I used to cringe whenever I saw somebody walk in with a handful of paper.

Weaver and Hawk didn't seem to know how to run Gene and me, so for a short time in the summer of 1973, Jimmy Crockett let me run our matches in one town — Greenville, South Carolina. When we started, the town was only doing around $1,600. It didn't even draw when they featured the world champion, so I went to Jimmy and asked him if he would let us try to run the town for a while. I had called my own finishes before, but this was the first time I was ever given an opportunity to run a program for any period of time. We ran it for most of the summer, but nobody else knew that. Jimmy

let me work out the angles, and then Gene and I would make interviews based on what I wanted to do, as opposed to what Weaver and Hawk wanted. Jimmy and his brother, Jackie, were handling the cameras for the interviews, so they were nice enough to let us cut our promos in another studio, and then Jimmy would insert them into the Greenville tape. Weaver and Hawk didn't realize we were doing it because they weren't watching the local TVs close enough to realize what was going on.

Gene and I were booked against Nelson Royal and Sandy Scott. I liked both Nelson and Sandy, but if I had been given an option to choose any babyface tag team to make money with, that wouldn't be it. But that's what we were given to work with. Looking back on it, I give Sandy and Nelson a lot of credit because the four of us built the house up to $8,000, close to a sellout, which was unheard of in Greenville at that time.

Rip Hawk was a decent worker and Johnny

Weaver made some money, but booking wasn't their forte. Gene and I weren't too happy with the way things were going with them in charge, so when they got canned in the spring of 1973, Gene and I went to talk with John Ringley.

John Ringley got his foot in the wrestling business by marrying Frances Crockett, the daughter of Jim Crockett. Ringley didn't have any power until the old man died on April 1, 1973, at which time Ringley took over the wrestling end of the business and became the head honcho per Mr. Crockett's wishes. With Ringley running the territory, Jimmy Crockett became the second-in-command.

John Ringley was a very smart, good-looking, sociable type of guy who could talk to anybody and make himself understood. It was easy to like John. However, I don't think he had much interest in the business. Gene and I recognized that fact, so we talked to John about getting a new booker.

I always felt that Gene and I were responsible for

getting George Scott the book in the Carolinas. Gene and I both had a high opinion of George, so we strongly suggested to Ringley that he bring George in as the booker. We thought George was the logical choice as booker for Crockett because he had worked with Gene and me on several finishes. When Gene and I were working with George and his brother Sandy in 1968 and 1969, George was the only person who had an opinion of his own on how things should be done. He used to laugh at George Becker and Johnny Weaver, who were booking during that time. George would say, "How did they come up with an idea like that?" Then he would suggest an alternate idea. "What if we did this?" The four of us would sit down and we would all brainstorm the idea. Gene and I both looked at George as someone who knew more than anybody else we had talked to at that point.

We had our differences of opinion and we butted heads a few times, but George did a good job as the booker. In fact, I would go so far as to say that

he did a very good job of it. George was a smart guy because he tried new ideas that hadn't been done in the Carolinas before. He made a lot of changes when he came in. The most important thing he did was bring in new talent. Jim Crockett always used wrestlers who had been around for a thousand years, people like Bob Nandor and Jesse James. Those guys might have been great talents at one time, but by 1973, they were getting up in years. They had lost whatever spark they once had, so for the first time, under George Scott's direction, the territory had young, vibrant talent, instead of the old farts who had been there for years. George brought in people like Johnny Valentine, Don Jardine, and Wahoo McDaniel. He kept Johnny Weaver, but that was about it. The other regular guys made occasional appearances, but Weaver was the only one who was there consistently year after year.

For the most part, Crockett ran three towns a night. The "A" run, which was basically the first run, would start in Charlotte, North Carolina, or

Greenville, South Carolina, on Monday. Fayetteville, North Carolina, also was a big town on Monday, but only ran every three to four weeks. During the off weeks, they would supplement the Monday night schedule with spot shows in small towns to give them three towns for the night. On Tuesday night, you had Raleigh, North Carolina, and Columbia, South Carolina. We also taped TV in High Point, North Carolina, on Tuesday night, to promote Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Greensboro, North Carolina, and whatever little towns might have been in that area. In the later years, they discontinued High Point TV and booked a third town. Wednesday night was Asheville, North Carolina, Raleigh television, and possibly a spot show. Asheville ran every Wednesday night in the City Auditorium until they built the new Asheville Civic Center. For the first time, they had a good place to run, so they scheduled the shows for every Sunday and drew big crowds. That was when George Scott came in, so business really boomed. Thursday was Norfolk, Virginia, and

Anderson, South Carolina. Of course, Winston-Salem and Greensboro also ran on Thursday, but that was only once a month, or every third week. The Friday towns were Charleston, South Carolina, Richmond, Virginia, and Lynchburg, Virginia.

I absolutely hated driving to Charleston. If we were in Norfolk on Thursday, it was a 400-mile drive to Charleston. It was a waste of time. A good house in Charleston was $3,000. If we had a sellout, the gate might be $5,000, but you needed something really hot to draw that kind of money in Charleston. Since we were paid based on the amount of money in the house, it wasn't a place that I really wanted to go. The long drive wasn't worth the payoff. Not only that, but if we were booked in Charleston, we had to leave Norfolk and drive 310 miles back to Charlotte, which put us home around four o'clock in the morning. If we wanted to be in Charleston on time, we had to be back on the road by two o'clock that afternoon. We would much rather go to Richmond

on Friday. Richmond was only 100 miles away from Norfolk and had the potential to do a lot better than Charleston.

The best towns on Saturday were Roanoke, Virginia, and Spartanburg, South Carolina. Lexington, North Carolina, which was George Harben's town, was a Saturday town located about 40 miles outside of Charlotte, but they quit running it in the mid-70s. In the summertime, the promotion ran a huge number of towns, including Wilmington, North Carolina, and Florence, South Carolina.

Some of the trips were long and arduous, but they were tolerable if we were booked correctly because most of the towns were booked in steps. We lived in Charlotte, so on Tuesday, we had a 140-mile drive to Raleigh. If we were booked in Raleigh on Tuesday, we always stayed overnight in Raleigh because Raleigh TV was taped on Wednesday. After TV, we left and drove the 170 miles to Norfolk. We would either stay

over in Norfolk that night or go ahead and drive the 100 miles up to Richmond for the Friday show. Then it was always a question of where we would be on Saturday. Most of the time, we were in Roanoke on Saturday, which was another 170 miles, and then we drove the 200 miles back to Charlotte that night because we had Sunday off.

In the early part of 1974, I was constantly complaining about things and told George that Gene and I wanted more money. We were making around $700 a week, give or take, and it was an easy territory, but I thought it was chicken feed compared to what we could be doing. By that time, George had been booking for seven months and he had brought some new talent in, so he finally lowered the boom. "You guys have been here too long. I want you out." It turned out to be a good business decision on George's part. The Andersons had been in the territory in one form or another since 1967, so George thought we needed a break. He also thought the Carolinas needed a break from the Andersons. That was probably

true, but I didn't understand his thinking at the time. And that's when I got the brilliant idea to run opposition.

Chapter 18
Georgia Championship Wrestling

In April 1974, Gene and I went to Georgia to work for Jim Barnett. That wasn't my original plan, though. When George Scott told us to find work elsewhere, the thought of going to another territory was the last thing on my mind. I was making plans to do something totally different. I was thinking about getting a group of guys together and running an opposition promotion against the Crocketts. In hindsight, that was a stupid idea on my part, but nonetheless, I began talking to several people about coming along with me. I found a small independent station in Charlotte, Channel 36, that offered to air my tapes. It was all just another of my popcorn ideas. I was really dumb. I wanted to be a big-time promoter, but I didn't have any

money to finance it while we got it up and running.

Looking back at it now, it all worked out for the best, but one of the mistakes I made was telling Jerry Brisco about my plans. I don't have proof of it, but I'm almost positive that it was the first time he stooged on me. None of the other wrestlers were from Florida, and Jerry was tight with Eddie Graham, so I'm just about certain that he was the one who spilled the beans. Early the very next morning, my telephone rang. It was Eddie Graham. Eddie didn't waste any time in getting to the point. "You don't want to run opposition," he said. I had pretty much come to that conclusion myself. I had been running my mouth to a few people about it, not thinking anything about the actual logistics of the enterprise.

"Why don't you come down to Florida and work for a few weeks." Eddie suggested. "Then I'll get you booked in Georgia. Jim Barnett is getting started as the promoter there. Louie Tillet is his booker, so you'll make some money. Regardless,

forget the idea of running opposition because it won't work."

I took his advice. I flew down to Tampa and worked a few shots. Afterwards, I flew back to Charlotte and Gene and I began our tour in Georgia. Gene and Lars had been in Atlanta in 1966, but that was the first time I had ever worked there.

The next morning, I told Gene, "We need to go down to the office and tell them what our requirements are. They need to know what we expect and what we want. If they don't like what I have to say, we'll leave. They can accept our notice and we can leave in four weeks, or whatever time frame they want us to stay, and then we're out of here. You have to realize, though, that we may get fired." As usual, Gene went along with anything I suggested. "Sure, whatever you wanna do."

We walked into the office to meet with Louie

Tillet and Jim Barnett. Louie had just begun booking the territory and he was very accommodating to our "requests." "If we're gonna work here, these are the conditions. We want to make as much money as we can, so we want to be on top. We also want to work all the TVs." That was my main concern. You can't get over if you're not on TV. "I also want to book my own angles." I wrapped it up by saying, "If you don't like us after four weeks, you can tell us to pack our bags and to get the hell out. We don't care either way."

Barnett answered with just one word. "Okay." More importantly, Tillet agreed with our terms.

I really liked Louie. I first met him when I went to Florida in 1971. Louie was instrumental in teaching me a concept that I used throughout my career. Shortly after we began wrestling in Georgia, Gene and I were working a program with Mr. Wrestling #1 and Mr. Wrestling #2 — Tim Woods and Johnny Walker. Louie sat down with

the four of us and gave us a finish that I considered to be pretty strong. I don't remember anything about it other than the ending. We were going to beat Tim Woods. When Louie stopped talking, Tim spoke up. He had a problem with the finish. He wasn't happy with the way it was going to make him look. "Jeez, Louie," Tim complained. "That's going to make me look bad."

When Louie first laid the idea on the table, even I thought it was too strong. In fact, a second before Louie answered Tim, I was ready to speak up and say, "Well, wait a minute. Maybe we can tone that idea down a little so Timmy doesn't look so bad." Louie beat me to the punch. He didn't hesitate and he didn't try to placate Tim. "You're right, Tim," he agreed. "You are going to look bad, but that's what we need."

The meeting ended and we went ahead with the match exactly as Louie had laid it out. As a result, the four of us continued to do big business for several months. I gave all the credit to Louie.

My respect for Louie went sky-high after that because he stood up for his ideas. As I said, even I thought the finish was a little bit strong, but Louie wanted it to be strong. He wanted Gene and me to get over as much as we could get over, and the way to do that was for Gene and me to take out the two guys who were legends in Georgia. Mr. Wrestling #1 had been there for several years and he was still the hottest thing that Georgia had. Now he was teamed with Mr. Wrestling #2 and the two of them together were over with the people. Louie's idea was somewhat like what I said to Dusty Rhodes years later. "You're over so strong that nobody believes you can be beaten. That's why we have to beat you decisively. The people have to understand that you are human, that you are vulnerable, that somebody can beat you." When we did that with Number One and Number Two, the people were completely taken by surprise. They had never done that in Georgia before because Timmy and John were invincible. Because of their invincibility, because no one believed they could be beaten, the fans

stopped coming to the matches.

Years later, when I started booking, I thought back on what I learned from Louie. If I had an idea, and felt certain that my idea was necessary for us to draw money, then that was it. I didn't try to modify my idea in order to make everybody feel better. If there was a purpose and a reason for an idea, then that's what I was going to do. There were times when I would try to work something out, but if someone still refused to do what I asked, then they had a choice to make. They did what I asked them to do, or they could find work elsewhere. For instance, I fired Kevin Sullivan when he refused to do a job. I didn't have any problem with that. I just said, "That's no problem, Kevin. You don't have to do a job. In fact, you don't have a job. Get the hell out of here."

Paul E. Dangerously was another person who didn't like the ideas I had planned for him. I didn't have to fire him. He took it upon himself to pack his bags and leave. For that, I have to give Paul

credit. He did what he thought he had to do. Generally speaking, though, I can't think of anyone who said, "I don't want to do that." They might have said, "Jeez, that doesn't make me look very good," but they eventually did what I asked them to do. I didn't give people a choice. Again, they either did it — or they found another place to work. Dick Slater was one of the few who always had a question about whether a finish would work, but with the rank-and-file, with most of the guys, nobody would say, "I don't like that finish."

Years later, when I was booking for Barnett in Atlanta, I brought Louie Tillet down. We had bought Knoxville from Ron Fuller for $25,000 and I wanted Louie to book the town. Barnett balked at the idea and said, "Oh, I can't afford him." I can't remember the exact figures, but we paid Louie something like $800 a week. It could have been more, but $500 of that came directly out of my paycheck because Barnett refused to part with the money. I believe we also paid Louie extra to take care of the towns and to referee. At Louie's

request, we also brought Stu Schwartz up from Tampa to referee because they were good friends. In the early ‘80s, we shut Knoxville down. In 1982, I brought Louie up to Charlotte, once again, to help me with the booking. That’s where Louie and I got a little bit sideways.

From time to time, we would get to a town and we would realize that someone was missing, so we would start asking around. "Has anyone seen Joe?"

"No one has seen him. What should we do?"

"Damn! Did he get his booking sheet?"

"Yeah, but he didn’t mention anything about being booked tonight."

Louie would then pipe up. "I’ve got my stuff. Do you want me to take the guy’s place?"

"Yeah, go ahead."

Later, when I asked Joe why he missed the town, he would just say, "I didn't know I was booked there. It wasn't on my booking sheet." It wasn't until much later that I found out what was going on. Louie was changing the booking sheets so he could take their place and get a little better payday.

When I discovered that, I suddenly remembered other strange things happening that had seemed out of whack at the time. Once in awhile, a guy would tell me that he had been booked on a card, but for some reason, was later taken off. I made the cards, but not the booking sheets, which were copied from the cards that I made. So I had to take a look at my master booking sheet. Sure enough! "Yeah, you were booked in Columbia the other night." For the most part, though, the guys never said anything. Why would they say anything? For all they knew, they weren't booked on a particular night because the town wasn't marked on their sheet.

I was angry with Louie for doing that, so I told

him to take a hike. He called me a year later, but I didn't see him again until almost 20 years later at the Cauliflower Alley Club meeting in Las Vegas.

Regardless of the situation, I liked Louie, and I still do. He did a good job when he was booking for Barnett in 1974. He put Gene and me on top, everyone made a lot of money, and everything worked out well — until Louie left. I don't remember the exact circumstances, but by July 1974, Louis lost the booking job. I'm almost certain the reason was that he just couldn't get along with Barnett. That was when Harley Race came in to book the Georgia territory. A month or so later, I gave my notice.

I liked Harley because I knew him when I broke into the business in 1967. We're the same age, give or take a few months. He lies about it all the time, but we are — about the same age, that is.

Harley was a talented wrestler in the ring. He had good ideas on how to run himself, but in my

opinion, he didn't have many ideas on how to manipulate anybody else. Everything that he did, as far as I could tell, was nonsensical. He operated on the principle that you should do things that the people wouldn't expect. I went along with that to a point. Eventually, though, Harley began to do some really goofy stuff. One night, he gave us his idea for our match and finished by saying, "Nobody will expect us to do this."

"Harley!" I countered. "If I dropped my pants and took a shit in the middle of the ring, nobody would expect that, either, but I'll also bet that nobody's gonna want to see it again!" In that instance, giving the people something they wouldn't expect would be a bad idea. I might not be giving Harley enough credit in regards to his booking ability. I just didn't think he had the aptitude for it. But that's just my opinion.

September was always a tough month for us, but even so, Gene and I were doing sellout business with Number One and Number Two. We could

have forged ahead with that program for months, but Harley did something similar to what George Scott did in the Carolinas, when Gene and I were having the two-hour matches with Paul Jones and Wahoo McDaniel. All of a sudden, we got beat on TV by Steve Keirn and Tiger Conway — in ten minutes. Harley wanted to do something similar to that in Georgia. "This isn't going to work," I said.

"Why won't it work? The people won't expect it."

I think Harley was right. The people didn't expect it because the houses fell off and the people stayed home in droves. Of course, it's just my opinion that Harley's ideas were the reason for the downturn in business. In any event, I eventually went to Barnett and said, "Jim, we have to go."

"Oh, my boy," he whined. "Aren't you happy here?"

"I was until our payoffs dropped." We had been

averaging $1,300 a week. That was the first time I heard Barnett utter the famous line that he repeated at least 10,000 times over the next ten years. "Oh, my God, Ole. All you think about is yourself."

Well, who else was I supposed to think about?

I gave him a choice. "Jim, if you want us to stay, you pay us to stay. Last summer, when Louie was here, our average was $1,300 a week. If you keep our paycheck looking the same, we'll stay as long as you want. Otherwise, we're leaving."

That was Barnett's first heated confrontation with Ole Anderson. Barnett made up the difference for Gene and me, so our checks stayed in that $1,300 range. We stayed there until November, at which point Barnett decided he couldn't afford us. "This is costing me too much," he conceded.

At that point, I said, "Fine, then we'll leave."

Barnett said the same thing he did before. "Oh, Ole! You don't think of anybody but yourself."

It all came to a head in Columbus, Georgia, during those last few weeks. Columbus was Fred Ward's town. Fred and his son-in-law, Ralph Freed, ran Macon, Columbus and Albany on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. They also ran the other small towns in the southern end of Georgia. Ralph and Fred did whatever they wanted to do in their towns. The only thing they had to do was accept the card that was put together by the Atlanta office. It's possible that Atlanta let them do their own booking at one time, but the office must have given Fred guidelines to follow in terms of who they used on top. When I first came to Georgia, Fred's other son-in-law, Leon Ogle, was supposed to be doing some of the booking, but it was probably for spot shows in places like Adel or Baxley. For the most part, the matches were booked by the booker in Atlanta. To use the Atlanta talent, Fred and Ralph paid a percentage of the gate as a booking fee to the Atlanta office.

Gene and I had been doing sell-out business in

Columbus with Number One and Number Two for several weeks. Again, I know that everybody claims they sold everything out, but we really were. One night, Doug Smith, who was the referee, came into the dressing room and wanted to know how we were going to get beat.

"We're not," I argued.

"Why not?" he asked. "Since you guys are finishing up tonight, we'd like you to put them over."

"What the hell are you talking about? We're here for two more weeks. We're not leaving until ..." whenever it was.

"Well, this will be your last night here in Columbus."

I knew that the next three shows had already been booked with us working on top with Number One and Number Two, so I asked, "What's going on?" He stumbled around and didn't really say

anything. I finally said, "You get Fred Ward in here." When Fred walked in with Ralph Freed, he was steaming mad. He laid right into me. He didn't want me in his part of the territory anymore. Gene and I didn't have a clue as to what had him so riled up. "What the hell is this all about, Fred?"

That's when I found out that I had been accused of something that I didn't do.

I need to backtrack in time. That wasn't the first peculiar incident that happened in Fred's towns. When Gene and I first arrived in Atlanta in 1974, we worked on the Columbus house show, but we weren't booked on Fred's television shows. After two weeks of not being on TV, I went to Barnett and said, "Fred Ward has us on his house shows, but we're not on his television. Why aren't we on his studio shows? If we're not on the television, we can't draw any money down there."

"Fred doesn't want you and Gene down there,"

Barnett answered. "Don't worry about it, though. Just let me handle it. I'll set things up so you can work in Florida on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday." Eddie Graham ran Tampa, Miami and Jacksonville on those nights, along with TV in Tampa on Wednesday mornings.

I really didn't want to do that, so I told Barnett that I wanted to go down and have a talk with Fred Ward. "Oh, don't do that," Barnett insisted. "Fred and Ralph are just so difficult to deal with. Let me handle it." Now, you have to understand something. Barnett also owned a piece of the Tampa office. He didn't own a piece of Macon, Columbus and Albany, so it was obvious that he would rather have us work in Florida. The problem with that was that I didn't want to fly down to Florida every week. After my experience there in 1971, I didn't have any desire to go back. I also wanted to work in one territory, and since I was in Atlanta, I wanted to work there.

That was my first experience with the

deviousness of Jim Barnett, even though at that time, I wasn't aware of what a conniving charlatan he was, but I didn't wait around for him to take care of the situation. I called Fred Ward myself. I said, "Fred, we've been down here for a couple of weeks and you haven't had us on your TV. If you're not gonna put us on your TV, I'm not working your towns." Fred was a quiet guy and, in my opinion, trustworthy. He said, "Ole, if you'll give me a week, you'll be booked on my TV." He was true to his word. We were on the next studio show.

A few weeks later, I looked at my payoffs from Fred Ward's towns — Macon, Columbus and Albany. For several weeks, we had been doing sellout business with Number One and Number Two. In those days, if the house in Columbus sold out, the gross was somewhere around $15,000. Since we were the main event, we were supposed to get somewhere in the range of 4 percent apiece. No matter how you look at it, I had a $600 bill coming, but I was getting $350, $400. I

showed my paycheck to Barnett and asked, "What in the hell is this?"

Barnett asked, "How much do you think you have coming?"

I told him what I thought based on my figures. "You know damn well, Jim. The four of us should have got six hundred bucks apiece."

"Oh, I'll make up the difference," he said.

That wasn't good enough for me. "Well, I'm going down to have another talk with Fred Ward and Ralph Freed."

He cut me off. "Oh, don't talk to them. I don't know why they're so stingy. I don't know why they try to cheat you on the payoff when you and Gene are drawing a lot of money for them. I'll make it up, but don't say anything."

And he did make it up, so I didn't talk to Fred about the payoff. I thought Barnett was a really

nice guy. Here he was, making up the difference out of his own pocket.

It wasn't until we came back to Atlanta to book for Barnett in 1976 that Ralph, Gene, Fred and I had it out. We had a big sit-down. Since I was going to be booking the Georgia territory, we were all going to be working together, so i wanted to clear the air. "Number one, I didn't do what you two accused me of doing. The second thing that bugs me is that you shorted us on our payoffs back in 1974."

Ralph Freed turned beet red at the comment. "What are you talking about?" he bristled.

"Well, when your houses were selling out down here, supposedly $15,000, you were sending money up to Barnett with instructions to pay us $350 to $400. You should have been paying us $500 to $600."

Ralph sat in silence for a few seconds and then stood up. "Let me show you something," he said. We were in the office at the old Sports Arena. He walked over to the filing cabinets and pulled out several thick folders. When Ralph found one folder labeled "1974," he began to pull sheets of paper out. "Look at this," he said, and spread the papers out on the table. They were the paysheets for August, September, and October, 1974.

"Here's the money I was sending to the office," Ralph pointed out. Fred and Ralph paid out 25 percent of the gross. That was their standard procedure. They didn't care how the 25 percent was spread out, but they did send suggested guidelines for paying the wrestlers. Fred and Ralph were running the town, so they knew who was drawing the money. They would write an amount beside the name of each person on the card for each specific week. The wrestlers in the first two matches should get $75 apiece. The wrestlers in the third match should each get $125. Finally,

the main event wrestlers — Ole Anderson, Gene Anderson, Mr. Wrestling #1, and Mr. Wrestling #2 — should each get $600. They totaled it all up, wrote a check, and sent it up to Atlanta.

Well, it wasn't hard for me to make the leap and realize that someone in the Atlanta office had been screwing us. More than likely, it was Barnett, since he was the one in control of the money, but I can't prove that. I do know that Ralph and Fred weren't screwing us. They sent 25 percent of the gross to the office, which is all they were expected to do. For instance, if we did a $16,000 house, about $4,000 would go to the office. Barnett took his cut, a booking fee, which was $1,000 to $1,500, and paid the rest out. At least, he was supposed to pay the rest out. Ralph would write down, "$600 for Ole, $600 for Gene, $600 for Number One, $600 for Number Two." However, our checks were only $400, which means $800 was going somewhere else. You can bet the undercard guys weren't seeing it in their checks, so where was it going? Someone in the office was

picking up an extra 800 bucks from the four of us — $200 from me, $200 from Gene, $200 from Timmy, and $200 from John. And if we were being shorted, I'm sure the underneath guys were also short 25, 30, or 50 bucks apiece. Someone in the office was cutting everybody's money. By the time someone in the office completed their creative bookkeeping, they had picked up quite a bonus for the night. However, I was the only guy who complained, so Barnett made up the money for Gene and me — out of his own pocket. Yeah, sure, right! For all I knew, everybody else was still getting screwed.

That was when I got my first inkling that perhaps Barnett was more of a conniver than I thought he was.

That brings us back to the Columbus incident, prior to Gene and me leaving the territory. When Fred walked into the dressing room, he was really mad. It was an event in itself that Fred got mad at me because Fred never got mad at anybody, but he

was mad enough that he took his jacket off, like he was going to fight me. I said to Fred, "What the hell are you talking about? I didn't have anything to do with the situation you're talking about." It was the truth. I had nothing to do with the situation, so when Fred and Ralph confronted me, I said, "Hey, bring the person involved in and ask them."

They didn't know what to do. Ralph said, "Well, we've heard on good authority ..." They never brought the person in, but they must have realized that someone had fed them a line of bull. When we left a few weeks later, I'm not sure if Ralph was convinced that I was totally innocent. Of course, not too long after that, some things happened that made them realize that they did have the wrong guy on the carpet.

Fred later told me that Jim Barnett was the person who told them that I was involved in the situation.

Once everything was out in the open between me,

Ralph, and Fred, I learned something else from Fred. When Gene and I went to Georgia for the first time, Barnett told Fred Ward that the Andersons didn't want to work in his towns. Fred and Ralph were both insulted by that and said, "Fine, then they won't be on our television, either." That was another one of Barnett's swerves. He was a master manipulator. The only drawback was that he relied on everybody not talking to anyone else. In many cases, that worked. Barnett would get Dusty and me going at each other until I finally came to the realization that we had both been manipulated by Barnett. I would say, "Hey, Dusty ..." Very often, Dusty would prefer to believe Barnett rather than me. Of course, Dusty was guilty of being a manipulator, too. Birds of a feather —

Once we realized that we had all been had by Barnett, Ralph and I worked together on a lot of things. Years later, when I was booking, I relied heavily on Ralph. When we went north to Ohio, Ralph was the person who usually ran the towns

because he was dependable and reliable. He knew when the people in the box office were trying to screw us. Ralph also was very knowledgeable about how to do the publicity like we used to do it. He did a really good job. By that time, Fred had taken a back seat and let Ralph do whatever he wanted to do. Ralph would tell Fred, "I've got it under control, boss." Fred was happy to just walk around the building and shake hands with the fans, and then come into the dressing room and shake hands with the boys. So with Ralph taking care of that end of the business, I was free to concentrate on booking the towns. I had a good business relationship with both Ralph and Fred. I even went to Fred's funeral — and I don't go to funerals.

The week after Gene and I left Georgia, which was in November 1974, Barnett fired Harley and brought Tom Renesto in as the new booker. Tom stayed there until October 1976, which is when Gene and I returned to Georgia to book.

Chapter 19
Sharpening the New Pencil

Before we left Georgia in November 1974, I wrote a letter and sent a video tape to Roy Shire, a former wrestler who promoted the northern California territory. I told him that we would like to wrestle in San Francisco if he had a spot for us. Shire sent a nice letter back and said that Gene and I were exactly what he was looking for. He said he would put the world tag team belts on us and book us in main events. We were scheduled to start in January 1975, but he didn't mention a guarantee. There was no mention of money, but that wasn't unusual. Very seldom did promoters make guarantees. The only guarantees I remember getting were from Stu Hart for $300 a week and Eddie Graham at $500 a week.

In the meantime, Gene and I had both moved back to Charlotte because we had homes there. In late 1974, Gene and I were at the gym. He pulled me aside and asked me, "Do you wanna stay here?"

We both had our homes and families there, so I made the natural choice. "I'd rather stay in Charlotte than go out to the West Coast," I said. "What's the deal?"

"George Scott called and made us an offer," Gene explained. "He said he'll make us a lot of money. When George heard about the plans that Shire had for us, it gave him an idea. He wants to create a version of the world tag team title for the Charlotte territory. He plans to publicize a tag team tournament that supposedly took place in San Francisco. We'll come in with the belts that we were supposed to have won in that tournament and work a program with Wahoo McDaniel and Paul Jones." That's where the Charlotte version of the title came from.

Unlike people who think Gene and I aren't Hall of Fame material because we never went to California or New York, we were good enough to be in demand. Naturally, I agreed to the plan. That was a hard deal to pass up, but as I said, I didn't base my decision solely on money. We both had homes there.

I didn't have anything to do with the negotiations with George Scott. Gene was handling all of our negotiating because George and I still weren't on speaking terms because of the words we had when we left in 1974, although the problems with our relationship hadn't reached the point it did later. When George made the offer, he needed someone who could work and draw some money. I think he felt that Gene and I could do that for him. I read an interview recently where George said he didn't think much of me. That may be true, but when it came down to doing the work, developing new angles, and talking, he sure depended on Gene and me to help carry the territory. In retrospect, if you had asked George,

"Do you mean to tell me that you didn't think Ole had much ability?", you would also have to ask two other questions. "If you didn't think much of Ole, why did you make Ole and Gene the world tag team champions?" and "Why did you book the Andersons in the main events for almost two years?"

Gene and I both felt like we were responsible for helping George get his job, but I don't think George brought us back in as a way of paying us back. If he didn't think much of me, then did he bring us in because he felt sorry for us? I don't know. I do know that he was making serious changes in the territory by bringing in real talent. For the first time, he had a few people there who had some ability. We drew a lot of money in Georgia during the seven months that we were there, and he knew that. Regardless of his reasons, we went back to work in January and he did what he said he would do — he made us money — the most money I had made to that point.

One of the first things George did was to call and invite me to his house. He wanted some input on ideas, which was George's way of doing things. My understanding is that he also had a meeting with Don Jardine and Johnny Valentine. Basically, he was authorizing each one of us to run our own program. George would say, "Okay. You and Gene are in Greensboro for four weeks and you'll be working a program with these two guys." Or, "You can work with your choice of these six guys. Come up with something."

Johnny Weaver wouldn't have dreamed of doing that. Weaver would have used something that had been written in his book 30 years earlier and he would have read it back to us verbatim. He would say, "Here's what you do." If I said, "Wait a minute. That doesn't make sense in this situation," he would say, "Well, that's what we want to do."

George Scott was orchestrating the rest of the guys in the territory, but he was smart enough to realize that he needed a little help. He knew there

were people who could work their own programs out. He would ask me for an idea and I would give him an answer. He would say, "Okay, we need an idea that we can use to switch the belts. I want to do that around the 18th of May. Give me a couple of ideas on how we can build up to that." Gene and I came up with the finishes. We came up with the angles. We came up with just about everything that had to do with us.

In my opinion, George was smart enough to realize that he needed help, but he had a problem in that he couldn't admit to anyone else that he was getting help. He didn't want Jimmy Crockett to know that some of us were putting our own programs together. That ego caused George and me to end up sideways again. He called me in one day and said, "I want you to come up with a finish. Take a couple of days to work up an angle and let me know." A few days later, I went to the office and sat down with him. "Did you come up with something?"

"Yeah," I answered, and began going over it. As I got into the details for how to get the angle started, Jimmy Crockett walked in. George immediately broke in and cut me off. "That's a good idea, Ole, but I don't think it would work. That might work in some places, but it won't work here. I'll come up with something by tonight, then I'll sit down with you and give you my finish." He grandstanded for Crockett. I was hot! I was big-time hot!

At the TV tapings that night, the first thing George did when I walked in was to come over to me and ask, "What was that idea of yours again?"

I was so mad. I was really pissed off. "What a bunch of crap! You ask me for help and for ideas, but you're too damn proud to admit that somebody else might be helpin' you once in awhile." We still hadn't reached the point where I said, "George, what the hell's the matter with you? You're knocking everything I'm doing, but we're drawing money with my ideas, not

yours." Our conversation didn't go there at that time.

The truth be told, I suspect that Johnny Valentine was running all of his programs, or at least, most of them. I also suspect that Don Jardine, who wrestled as Super Destroyer, was running all of his programs. I know we were running all of our programs. I came up with our finishes in almost all cases. I came up with the angles on TV. The big angle we did where there was a double knockout with Gene and Wahoo McDaniel — that was my idea from the start. Most of the angles were my ideas, yet George was too proud to admit that to anyone.

That was where I really got crossways with George. It got to the point where we weren't talking very much, so whenever he had anything to tell us, he would talk to Gene. George would give the finishes to Gene and Gene would bring them to me.

George had good finishes on occasion, but I saw a lot of bad ones, as well. There was one show in particular that stands out in my mind. I walked into the dressing room before one of our outdoor shows at the ballfield in Charlotte. I had come in late, so Wahoo was telling me what the planned finish was. I listened to it and said, "Who in the hell thought that one up? Are you guys smoking dope or what?" Wahoo tried to give me the high sign, or what we called the iggy. Wahoo would get sheepish in situations like that, like a little kid. "Uhhh, well ..."

I went right on. "Spit it out! What are you stuttering about? If you guys came up with that finish, then one of you is stupid." What I didn't realize was that George had walked in and was standing behind me. It turned out to be George's finish — one that he had been saving for that very moment. Well, I had already said what a dumb idea I thought it was. Naturally, George was pissed. He said, "Why don't you just do whatever you want to do."

A lot of times, George would sit down and ask, "What do you think? What do you want to do?" If he had an idea, he would say, "I was thinking about this," and then he would say, "What do you think we ought to do here?" At times we had a good discussion, but at other times, we had a disagreement. His standard approach was, "I have you guys booked here for the next two shows. What do you think?" So the next two shows were in concrete. What Gene and I did on those shows was what we had to decide. There were other times when George would say, "I'd like to get these guys over. Come up with something where we can get them over, but still keep yourselves looking good." That was pretty close to the way it went.

The knockout angle took place when we came in with the tag belts, which we supposedly won in the fictitious tournament in San Francisco. After we were on TV for several months, they began talking about a new team on the horizon — Wahoo McDaniel and Paul Jones. George wanted us to

kick the program off on TV. I think we even switched the belts on TV one time. I was coming up with my own finishes, so I came up with an angle that was based on an idea I had stolen from Leo Garibaldi. It was something that I had heard Leo talk about. It was simple, yet it was a good idea.

Wahoo and Paul had done a pretty good job of beating us down. Wahoo goes into his war dance and hits Gene. Gene falls back into our corner and I tag him. As I come in, Wahoo hits me with a chop and goes into his dance with me. He really pounds the hell out of me, so I'm just barely hanging on. As Wahoo goes into his war dance again, Gene staggers to his feet on the ring apron and leans over the top rope. He yells at me and points to his head.

Jimmy Crockett and Bob Caudle were calling the match, so I told them what to say. "Gene has staggered to his feet! He's yelling at Ole! We can't tell what he's saying! It looks like he's

pointing to his head!" As Wahoo dances around me, I shove Wahoo in desperation toward Gene and their heads crash together. Gene falls off the ring apron onto the floor and Wahoo falls back into the ring. I collapse on top of Wahoo for the win. "One, two, three!" They take both Wahoo and Gene to the hospital.

The people really bought it. Even the underneath boys talked about it when they had time on the mike. Bob Caudle would ask them, "What about those Andersons?"

"Oh, I just can't believe it! How could anyone be so low as to sacrifice his brother?"

The next week, we did interviews that set the whole premise up. We told the people that Gene might not make it. He was in bad shape. I said, "Gene and I talked about things beforehand, and we realized the importance of these tag belts. We both agreed that we'd rather sacrifice one of us, and go out as champions, than to not have these

belts." Then Wahoo, who also was recuperating, and Paul Jones, went out and said, "That's the worst display of selfishness we have ever seen! How in the world could two guys, let alone two brothers, think so much of those belts that they'd be willing to sacrifice one another just to keep them?"

What an angle! It was a simple angle, but it really worked. The interviews really bolstered it. It came across like a shoot. From that time on, every time we did an interview, we let the people know that Gene and I were willing to sacrifice each other in order to keep the belts. That also translated as to how far we would go to beat our opponents. We would do anything to win our matches. We didn't start working with Paul and Wahoo on the house shows for a few weeks after the angle because we were in the middle of another program with someone else. We refused to wrestle them, until we were finally forced into it. We kept building the program throughout the summer, which was always our best time, and then

we began doing the one-hour broadways, which meant that we wrestled for one hour. In the following weeks, we increased it to two-hour broadways and no-time-limit matches. We did big, big business with Paul and Wahoo for the biggest part of 1975.

Those were good times. Jimmy Crockett had bought an RV, so several of us would ride together on occasion. George, me, Wahoo, Gene, Paul Jones, Valentine — whoever was on the card. Crockett used to cook for us as we traveled together all over the territory in that RV. Of course, that was against my rule in regards to babyfaces and heels traveling together, but it didn't have a sign on the side that said "Wrestling Bus." I'm sure some people knew, though. The rats must have known.

After we finished our run with Paul and Wahoo, George asked me, "Who do you guys want to work with in Greenville?" There weren't a whole lot of people to choose from that we hadn't worked with

a thousand times. As George asked me that, the door opened and a new guy walked into the office. I didn't know the guy from Adam's house cat, but he looked like somebody special. I didn't hesitate. I said, "I'll take that guy and Timmy Woods." The wrestler was Dino Bravo. We worked quite a few shots in Greenville with them. In fact, we had been working with Timmy and Dino on May 24, 1976, the night the old man sliced me open.

During that time, Gene and I drove to Atlanta to work one shot for Jim Barnett. We were supposed to be on the semi-final, which was okay with me, but someone was late, or they had a problem of some sort, so Tom Renesto asked if we would mind going on third. I said, "No problem. As long as I get my money, I don't care." He agreed that we would be paid according to our scheduled position in the semi-final.

After our match, we cleaned up and left. The following week, we got our paychecks in the mail

— for something like $200. One day after we got the lousy $200 payoff from Barnett, I walked into the Charlotte office. Jimmy Crockett was on the phone. When I realized that Jimmy was talking to Barnett, I took the phone from him. I said to Barnett, "If you're so hard up for money that you can't afford to pay us, then maybe I should send you the money back." The long and short of it is that Barnett sent us another $200 each.

Chapter 20
Johnny Valentine

I'd like to share a few memories of Johnny Valentine. John was really something to watch. I met him when I first got into the business in 1967. The guys back then were full of piss and vinegar. There were a few guys who were dull, but of course, they were the ones who didn't do interviews. John Valentine was great both in the ring and on interviews, but when you first began listening to him, you would notice that he didn't have the pizzaz that everybody else did. He just did a straight-forward, down-to-earth interview and didn't embellish a lot.

John wrestled the same way. He seldom kicked or punched anybody. He usually stayed in a hold. In fact, he would grab a hold and lock onto it for a long time. A lot of people — Verne Gagne, George Scott, myself included at one point —

would watch and think, My, God! Is that all this great worker is capable of doing? He's stinking the joint out. John laid on the mat to the point where I thought George Scott was going to get rid of him after a few weeks because the people were yelling, "Hey, if all you're gonna do is dance, at least play some good music." They would actually start chanting, "We wanna see some wrestling." They were used to seeing people moving around the ring and doing a lot of high spots. But John had the ability to do something that very few people could do, and that was to take his time and work hard. He never, ever broke stride.

For instance, I used to watch him walk out into the arena. He made a whole production out of just getting into the ring. John would put his foot on the first step of the ring steps, but before he stepped up onto it, he'd look around at the audience. A few of them would begin to hoot and catcall at him. Initially, there weren't a lot of people yelling at him, but as soon as those few began, he'd move his foot back down to the arena floor. After a few

seconds, he'd place his foot back on the bottom step. The people would boo a little bit louder — and he'd put his foot back down. When he put his foot on the step for the third time, the people in the audience would boo even more. John could play that little scenario out for ten minutes, working his way up, one step at a time, and never get into the ring — but he had the people in the palm of his hand. When he finally got into the ring, he would start the same scenario all over, only this time it was the process of taking his jacket off. It took time to see the whole picture. It was a masterpiece. By the time he began to wrestle, he had the complete, undivided attention of the audience.

That scenario took place over a period of many weeks. From that point on, John was over [popular with and/or hated by the audience] — and over big time. He could grab a headlock and work that headlock for ten minutes, and have the people screaming themselves hoarse. It was amazing. After three, four, maybe even five

months, it got to the point where the people simply believed everything that John did.

John gave me some good advice. "You never do anything to expose the business. If you have a 60-minute match, and everything is perfect and tight for 59 minutes, then you throw one lousy punch, or one lousy kick, or something that doesn't connect, or something that looks funny — that's what the people are gonna remember. You have to be careful to never, ever do anything that will expose you." That's why Johnny didn't hit anybody with his fist. He always used the forearm. His forearm, however, was solid. It hurt like hell. He didn't kick excessively, either. Sure, once in awhile he might sneak a boot in, but he was very careful about how he did it. He wasn't indiscriminately kicking his opponent throughout the match.

When John was in the ring, he only had one rule. He always got his hand raised. That was his deal with the promoters. He could get beaten up, but he always got his hand raised. John told me

something that I used many times when I was booking. There were times when I had to tell a guy that he had to lose. Of course, most of the guys didn't want to lose, but their main concern was that they didn't get buried. Consequently, regardless of what idea you gave them for a finish, they didn't like it.

John told me, "If you want a guy to do a job, sometimes it's better if you just go to the guy and ask him for an idea for a finish. At times, the guy won't say anything because he doesn't have any idea. Most of the time, though, he'll come up with an idea that's so horrible, it makes him look much worse that the idea you were going to use, even though he thinks he's making himself look good. At that point, offer him your suggestion. More than likely, your idea will sound so much better to him than what he wanted to do. Not only that, but he'll be happy to do it because the thing he wanted to do was stupid, compared to what you wanted him to do. If you give him your idea to begin with, he might argue

all day long about it. That's just human nature. But once he voices what he wanted to do, he'll listen to your idea and say, 'Yeah, that makes sense.'"

That approach usually worked with Dick Slater. Dickie was a talented kid. He worked a lot like Terry Funk. I saw them on tape one time and I couldn't tell the two apart. No matter what I would say to Slater, though, he would always say, "Well ... what if ..." He would mess with it and mess with it. By the time he talked about it for 30 minutes, he would come right back around to what I first said, only now he thought it was his idea. I would say, "Good idea," and we would go with it.

I wrestled a fellow named Steve Druk in Mankato. Steve was a bit of a conniver. I was young and Steve had been around for some time, so Verne left it up to Steve to give me the finish for our match. I was supposed to go over, so Steve came up with this elaborate finish where he beats the hell out of me and then throws me out of the

ring. After he pulls me back into the ring by my hair, he beats the hell out of me again. When he finishes beating the hell out of me, he beats the hell out of me. When I'm almost unconscious, he pulls me to my feet before the referee can count me out and beats the hell out of me. He pulls me off the mat again, stopping the count, and beats the hell out of me some more. After beating the hell out of me one final time after that, he picks me up to slam me. As he does, he trips and falls over backwards, with me landing on top. I pin him and win the match.

I was green, but I wasn't stupid. I said, "No way. That ain't gonna work." Druk was a real swerve artist. I don't remember what we did, but we didn't do his finish. I had only been in the business for a couple of months, so I didn't know a whole lot about the business, but I definitely knew that his idea was the shits.

Getting back to John Valentine, he was best known for his ribs, although he really pushed the

envelope and did some perverse things to the guys. There was one rib in particular that he liked to do. We used to tape TV every Wednesday at WRAL in Raleigh. At break time, we would all go across the street to the convenience store. Most of the time, we would all get ice cream cones. When it was John's turn to do his interview, he would hand his ice cream cone to somebody new to the territory and say, "Now don't eat it!" He would then go do the interview. We would be standing outside, cutting up and joking around. Of course, the guy invariably took a bite of John's ice cream. John knew this was going to happen, which was the reason he always did it. As soon as someone told John that the guy had taken a bite out of it, he'd come back and ask for his ice cream cone. Of course, the guy had already eaten it or taken a big bite out of it. John would give the guy a bunch of crap about it, curse the guy, and we would all have a good laugh over it.

The next week, John would get an ice cream cone and find the same guy. "Jeez, I've gotta do an

interview. Dammit! Don't eat it this time." Of course, as soon as John left, the guy either took a bite of the ice cream or ate the whole thing. John would keep this routine up for a few weeks. Finally, he would hand the guy the cone without saying anything, and then take off. Before the guy stuck the ice cream cone in his mouth, he noticed a smell. John had crapped in the cone.

John did another routine with a pouch of tobacco. A lot of guys chewed tobacco back then, so he would offer someone a chew. The guy would put three fingers into the pouch, pull out a plug of the loose stuff, and put it into his mouth. John would put the pouch back in his suitcase, making sure the guy saw him doing it. He would do that for two or three weeks in a row. Finally, he wouldn't offer it to the guy, but he would leave it in his suitcase where the guy could see it. The guy had been getting it every week for three weeks, so he just helps himself. Once he did that for a couple of weeks, John put a turd in the tobacco pouch. The guy opens the pouch and puts

his fingers in to get the tobacco, but comes out with three fingers full of crap.

John and I were both in the Carolinas when Jay York came in to wrestle. Jay had asthma, so he always carried an inhaler with him. The story I heard was that years before, John put lighter fluid in Jay's inhaler. Jay was going to get even by shooting John. When John walked into the dressing room the next night and put his Hamilton suitcase down, Jay blew a big hole in it with a handgun. Years later, I went to Jay and asked him, "Why did you shoot his bag? Why didn't you shoot Valentine?"

He said, "What good would it have done? The son-of-a-bitch wouldn't have registered if I had."

Chapter 21
Making Sense — and Nonsense

I learned a lot about the business by listening and talking to promoters — every one of them. You can name any promoter that I worked for — Eddie Graham, Bill Watts, Verne Gagne. I studied them because they were all smart and they were masters at what they did. By following their example, I think I learned as much about manipulation in the business as anyone. On the other hand, I never claimed to have all the answers. There were many times when I didn't have the first idea of what the right thing to do was. I was unsure of myself. I would mull ideas over in my mind and think, Should I do this, or should I do that? However, even though I didn't always know what was right, I pride myself in saying that I always knew what

was wrong. One of the things I said over and over was, "I may not always know what's right, but I can sure smell shit." I didn't always know what was going to draw money, but I sure knew what was going to turn everybody off. I could usually smell something that was totally screwed up and absolutely wrong. A lot of bookers would do something just to do something. They didn't have any idea of right or wrong, and they never had a justifiable reason for the things they did. They never thought things through to a logical conclusion.

Gene used to say to me, "Ole, I think we need to ..."

"Why would we do that, Gene?"

His answer would always be, "Well, the people won't expect it."

I would give him my stock answer that I gave Harley years before. The idea of using the

reasoning that people won't expect something is appropriate, but it doesn't work in all circumstances, so it's not always a justifiable reason to do something.

One good example of that is Bam Bam Bigelow. The kid was a pretty fair amateur wrestler. He did his signature move in the ring one night. It was a cartwheel. When he came back to the dressing room, I took him aside and asked, "That cartwheel ... what in the hell was that all about?"

"Well, that shows people how agile and athletic I am."

"Let me give you a little idea of what that cartwheel looks like," I said. "You walk into a bar. You knock the door down. You don't even take time to open it. You just knock it down and walk over it. You storm up to the bar, grab a bottle, and break it over the edge of the bar. You stick the jagged edge in your head and you cut

yourself. You turn to the people in the bar and you say, 'All right! Who wants a piece of my ass?' What kind of a reaction do you think you're gonna get?"

"Or, we can do it your way. You open the door and you do a cartwheel. You walk in and you say, 'Okay, I'm the toughest guy in the bar. Does anybody have a problem with that?'"

That was the difference between me and the other wrestlers. There were guys who thought Bam Bam Bigelow doing a cartwheel was a good way to get over. Kevin Sullivan used to think that he could get heat by laying on the beach and covering himself up with sand. As an unsuspecting guy walks by, Kevin reaches up and grabs him by the ankle. He did things that were so off the wall — all that 666 and devil worship nonsense. I remember thinking, What the hell is that all about? But Kevin thought it all made a lot of great sense.

I brought Bruiser Brody into Atlanta. He was a guy unto himself. He came out to do an interview with a light bulb in his mouth. I asked him, "What the hell is that supposed to be about?"

"Well, the people think I'm crazy," he answered.

"No, they don't," I corrected him. "The people think you're nuts — not desperate nuts, mean nuts, or 'I'm-gonna-kill-somebody' nuts — just goofy. Get the light bulb out of your face and don't do it again."

Another example was a match in Fayetteville with Rufus R. Jones and Paul Jones — the Jones boys. This was in the early part of 1976. We were at the tail end of our big run with Wahoo and Paul Jones and now we had Rufus R. Jones in for a couple of shots. We had a tremendous house in Fayetteville. At that time, Fayetteville was really doing big business every couple of weeks.

There I go again, telling stories like the old

boys. Every show I wrestled on was a sellout. It was a good house, though.

On that night, George Scott thought he had a brilliant finish worked out. We had worked up to a no disqualification, there must be a winner match. We wanted to make it a little bit different and get away from those one-hour and two-hour broadways. George sent Gene over with a finish that had Gene tied up in the ropes and counted out. Gene said, "George wants us to do a countout."

"Dammit, Gene!," I argued. "We can't do that! It's a no disqualification match. A countout is the same type of thing. It's a disqualification. The people have to have a winner! You tell George that this is a stupid idea."

Gene calls, and then comes back. "George says to do whatever you want to do."

That was another of those incidents that caused a

little friction between George and me. In that case, though, he was absolutely, dead wrong. I go back to my statement that there are times when I don't know what's right, but I sure know what's wrong.

We stayed in Charlotte until September 1976. That was when Gene and I left to take the book in Georgia. I always suspected that George Scott was the guy who set that up. I don't know for sure that he had anything to do with it, but I'm almost certain that he laid the groundwork with Jim Barnett to bring us in as the bookers. It could have been Jimmy Crockett. For that matter, it could have been both of them, but I always thought it was George. He might have been repaying us because we were responsible for getting him the job in the Carolinas, or for doing so much to help him there. Regardless, I think George felt that we could handle the booking job because I had been booking most of the matches involving Gene and me.

In 1973, I didn't have the confidence to book the

entire Charlotte territory. After all, I was young and I had only been in the business for six years. Thanks in great part to George Scott, I learned a lot of what I needed to know about booking through the experience of running our own programs. That experience would shape the direction of my career over the next fifteen years.

Chapter 22
The Life of a Salmon

In the fall of 1976, Jim Barnett made a trip to Charlotte to meet with Gene and me. We picked him up at the airport and took him to the wrestling office, where he offered us $500 apiece to book the Georgia territory. As we drove back to the airport, Barnett asked, "Well, boys. Do we have a deal?" I wasn't going to accept Barnett's first offer, but as soon as the words left Barnett's mouth, Gene blurted out, "Yeah, we'll take it!"

In all the years that I had known him, Gene never said more than two words in a row. And yet, in what I considered to be one of the biggest decisions we were ever going to make, Gene opened his mouth and took the first offer that Barnett put on the table. I was so mad at Gene. Five hundred bucks a week and main event pay, and Gene said, "Yes."

With Gene having said that, I couldn't do anything without the two of us looking like we were a little screwed up. At least that's what I thought, so I let it stand. When Barnett got out of the car and walked into the airport, I said, "Gene, in all the years I've known you, you've never said two words in a row. And now, with something that was as important to us as anything in our whole life, you agree to work for that guy for a lousy $500 a week. What were you thinking?" He just mumbled, like he always did.

When we left Charlotte, George Scott agreed to let us take the world tag team title belts with us, with the stipulation that we return to defend them in the Carolinas every so often. I took a little time off in September and we arrived in Atlanta in October. The first thing we did was sit down in the office for a meeting with Barnett. His first words were, "My boys! You have until Thanksgiving to sell out the Omni."

When Gene and I went to Georgia, there were no

problems between us. We both knew who was going to run the promotion — me! We never discussed the situation. That's just the way it was. Gene really didn't want to do it, anyway. Initially, Barnett made the mistake of thinking that Gene was the brains between the two of us. A month or two after we started booking, Barnett took Gene to Mobile, Alabama, when he was negotiating to buy the Mobile territory from Lee Fields. Gene sat in the car while Barnett went into the meeting. Later on, Barnett tried to convince me that he always knew who was making the decisions. "Oh, Ole. I knew all along that it was you."

On the first Friday night after we took over the book, which was our first show, Tom Renesto walked up and handed me some papers. He said, "This is tonight's card. These are the guys that are gonna be on TV tomorrow. You figure it all out." That was it! He wasn't happy.

Bookers didn't last very long in Atlanta. Tom

Renesto was the only booker who had any staying power. He was there for almost two years. I really don't know what Tom was capable of doing, although I've had people tell me that he was pretty smart and had some good ideas. However, I think that once you get to the point where your age is such that you can't do anything else but book, you find yourself in tough situations. I think Tom needed that job. Tom was beyond his wrestling days, so he didn't have the option of packing up his gear and going somewhere else to wrestle. It was important to him to hang onto the booking job as best he could.

When you're in that situation, you might have to go along with some things that you don't think are too good for business. Many times, even if you think the ideas are wrong, you have to go along with them. You take an occasional back seat because some so-called "star" who was in tight with the powers-that-be in the office, or whoever the power might be, is going to eat you up and give you a lot of grief. You don't want any grief, so you

find yourself kowtowing to the "star," who usually doesn't know much about the wrestling business when it comes to manipulation. In that situation, the best you can do is to let as many people know as possible that it was the "star's" idea and decision. You want people to realize that you're just going along with his ideas.

Of course, the problem with that is that you spend your time trying to placate people, so you waste valuable time and energy that could be better utilized doing your job. At that point, you think, Who the hell is running this thing? Pretty soon, the houses begin to drop and the promotion starts to lose money because you aren't doing what's right for business.

When that happens, the owners of the promotion make a change in personnel and you're out. Once again, you're looking for work. Tom once told me, "You know, when you're the booker, you're like a salmon swimming upstream, seeking the path of least resistance. The worst thing about it is, once

you reach your goal, you die." I thought that was the perfect description of Tom's situation. Tom had been the salmon swimming upstream, seeking the path of least resistance, until he eventually got fired.

When I took over the book, Dusty Rhodes was running his own program in Atlanta, just like Gene and I did in the Carolinas. Dusty was spending the majority of his time wrestling in Florida, but he was coming to Atlanta on a regular basis to work the Omni or City Auditorium on Friday nights. Whenever Dusty was booked in Atlanta, Dusty ran Dusty. Dusty booked himself in the main event and Tom didn't have anything to say about it. For the most part, Tom just stepped back and gave Dusty free reign. To some degree, Dusty may have been running a couple of the other matches in Atlanta, while Tom Renesto was booking what was left over.

When I came in, Dusty was working on top with Larry Hamilton, the Missouri Mauler. Larry was

coming up from Florida, too. The records show that with Dusty and Larry on top, the territory was in terrible shape. They weren't drawing. The gate in Atlanta was between $5,000 and $6,000, $8,000 tops. Atlanta normally drew in the range of $18,000 to $20,000, so the houses were a quarter to a third of what they should have been. This was during the time when Tom was supposed to be the booker, so he got the blame, even though Dusty was running the house, his own match in particular, which was usually the main event.

What does that say about Dusty's expertise as a booker? You can draw you own conclusion. I don't think Barnett thought much of Dusty's booking. If he did, why didn't Barnett make Dusty the booker instead of bringing me in? If Barnett thought Dusty had the talent to do something that would draw money, he would have made Dusty the booker — but he didn't.

Dusty and Mauler had been working the main event for several weeks. They were doing some

kind of a gimmick match where somebody had to have their balls cut off, or some other goofy idea. I laid it on the line when I talked to the Mauler. "You've gotta have a finish, Larry." In other words, either Dusty or Mauler had to lose in the middle of the ring. I didn't want a disqualification, a countout, or a run-in.

Larry was furious! He blew his top. Larry and Dusty threw a couple of alternate ideas at me, but I stood my ground. "No. You two can do whatever you want to do in the match, but there has to be a finish." I could have said a hair more, but I was trying to be diplomatic because that was my first official booking job. It really was more of a suggestion than anything, but I still insisted that it had to be done. If you didn't take a stand, the guys would try to walk all over you. For instance, I brought wrestlers into the territory who had never been there before. The fans had never heard of them, so I would put them on the first match. If the house was sold out, they would look out and say, "Jeez, I've only been here two hours and the place

is already sold out."

Conversely, if a guy walked in and the house was empty, the first question they would ask was, "Who's on top?"

"It's those damned Andersons again."

Mauler was very upset. Larry first met me in the Carolinas when I hadn't been in the business for a year, so he couldn't get past that. Of course, he considered himself to be an old pro — and he was. The Mauler was a good hand. He was an oddball wrestler who used to go like crazy and I saw him in some good matches. When I first met him in the Carolinas, he was teamed up with Hiro Matsuda, which was like teaming up shit and shinola. I don't know how they ever got together, but it was probably a desperation move on old man Crockett's part.

In my opinion, Larry was a very independent guy in many ways, but he also was very

political. Larry was smart enough to realize that Eddie Graham and Jim Barnett were running the show in their respective territories, and since Dusty Rhodes was the darling of both of them, it might behoove Larry to listen to Dusty Rhodes. On the other hand, I had just taken that power away from Dusty completely in Atlanta.

I was told that Mauler called Eddie Graham and told him two things. He was coming back to Florida and he was never going back to Atlanta. He also said that he wasn't going to work for someone who was brand-new in the business. He wasn't going to work with "that snot-nosed kid who doesn't know anything." True to his word, Larry went back to Florida, and he never wrestled in Atlanta again. In fact, I don't believe I ever saw him again.

I didn't know whether Barnett was serious about selling out the Omni by Thanksgiving, but we worked a program with Number One and Number Two. We worked so many different things over

the years that I don't remember the specifics of what we did. What I do remember is that on Thanksgiving night, we did sell out the Omni. We also sold out Columbus on that very same afternoon.

We sold out the Omni or the Auditorium every week until April 15 of the following year. The date may not have been exactly the 15th, but I do remember that it was tax time. We had run two weeks in a row at the Omni and that was the first time it wasn't a sellout. Even then, the figure in April was around $42,000. Was Barnett grateful and happy? Hell, no! He was upset because we only had 13,000 people, instead of 16,000 people. He accused me of slacking off and not working hard. He actually accused me of trying to kill the territory because it hadn't sold out like all the other shows. Yes, he used those words — kill the territory. I was so mad. I dumped it in his lap. "I have a great idea, Jim. You run the territory. Gene and I are out of here."

Before I could take two steps toward the door, he called me back. "Oh, Ole. Well, maybe ..." Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. We kissed and made up and I kept booking.

A few days later, I made a telephone call to Charlie Laye, who ran the Florida wrestling office. Since Barnett also owned a piece of the Florida territory, he would fly to Tampa every Tuesday and stay through Thursday. After three days of stirring the pot and getting everybody in the Tampa office at each others' throats, Barnett would return to Atlanta on Friday. Charlie said, "Well, kid. You can't win 'em all."

"Wadda you mean?"

"Barnett's been down here bitchin' and hollerin' and talkin' about how bad the Omni was."

"Charlie! If you stop and give it a little thought, what's wrong with a $42,000 house?"

"What?"

"You heard me! $42,000!"

"My, God!" Charlie exclaimed. "I thought Barnett said you did $4,200 in the Omni. We've never had a $42,000 house!" That included St. Petersburg, Jacksonville, or any of their towns.

The problem wasn't the house. The problem was that Barnett had become spoiled.

I could usually tell how a town was going to do a few days before a show. Atlanta and Columbus, in particular, were easier to predict than most of the other towns. I could tell you on Monday, four days before the show, if we were going to have a sellout in Atlanta or not, because the tickets would be sold to a certain row. If they were sold to row 22, we were selling out. We usually knew on Saturday, when we did a live TV show, how well we were going to do in Columbus on the following Wednesday. Our television show was over at four o'clock that afternoon. If the phones were ringing

off the hook by that time, we knew we were going to sell out.

Gene and I were taking home paychecks of $3,200, $3,500, a little more than $4,000, $2,800 — week after week after week. Gene and I each made around $140,000 during our first year there. That was big money for wrestlers in 1976. In the following year, we earned almost $180,000.

By 1976, Gene was beginning to have a lot of physical problems, primarily with his neck. He had been knocked out several times and his working ability had really slowed down. We put him in the hospital that year. At the time, Gene didn't even recognize his wife. That was just the first of many hospital visits he would make.

I remember one match in particular. I had Nelson Royal in the ring and I went to tag Gene. When Gene came in, instead of hitting Nelson, he laid into me with a big haymaker. I just eased around

him and climbed out between the ropes onto the ring apron. He went on with the match like nothing out of the ordinary had happened. A little while later, the scenario repeated itself. Gene hit me again. That caused a little bit of excitement back in the dressing room. The guys used to stand outside and watch the matches, so they got a thrill out of the fact that Gene had punched me a couple of times. When I talked to Gene after the match, he said that he didn't remember anything about it. That scared me because he seemed to be close to the edge.

Physically, Gene was in bad shape, so in November 1977, I made a call to George Scott, who was still booking the Carolinas. I asked him, "George, can you find some work for Gene to do in the office or somewhere?" George was more than happy to find something for Gene. I thanked George, called Gene in, and handed the phone to him. If George had said, "No," I would have kept Gene with me, but I don't know what I would have done with him. George Scott talked to Gene and

invited him back to the Carolinas to help him do different things in the office. That's when Gene and I went our separate ways. Gene took George up on his offer and moved back to Charlotte. I really believe that's what Gene wanted, anyway, because he had his family there.

The one thing that endeared me to Gene is that he was terribly loyal to me. We went to Atlanta together as the bookers, even though he wasn't that interested in doing it. He didn't want to run the guys. He never wanted to. He always told me, "I've got the best talker. It's you. I've got the best guy for finishes. It's you. I've got the best guy to make our deals. It's you. I'll do whatever you want me to do."

That was Gene Anderson. During our first years together, he was very helpful in trying to teach me how to work. He taught me to wrestle in such a way that our matches looked like a shoot. He told me to take it as close to a shoot as I could without hurting anybody. That was Gene Anderson's

philosophy. He said it constantly — work a shoot. Of course, he didn't always use those words. His most common expression was, "Beat the hell out of the guy, but try not to remove any teeth."

Gene died in Huntersville, North Carolina on October 31, 1991 at the age of 52. He had a heart attack and keeled over in the bathroom. It wasn't a surprise because his health had continued to deteriorate for years. Many of his problems stemmed from his lifestyle. One afternoon, as we were on our way to a town, he turned the radio on. The radio announcer said, "The three most harmful things you can put into your body are chocolate, caffeine, and cigarettes." I looked over at Gene. He was eating a box of chocolate doughnuts, drinking a cup of coffee, and smoking a cigarette. I said, "Gene, you have the recipe for a heart attack right there in your lap. What else can you possibly do that will shorten your life any more?"

By 1978, my third year in Atlanta, I was making more than $200,000. In the back of my mind, though, I had an itch to return home to Minnesota. In the summer of 1978, I was at the National Wrestling Alliance meeting in Las Vegas and talked to Verne Gagne about the possibilities. One year later, at the 1979 convention, Verne was the one who broached the subject. "Well, are you ready to come back?"

"Yeah, I think so," I replied. Then I thought about it and said, "You know, Verne, I'm really doing well. I think I'll pass on Minneapolis for now."

He tried to sweeten the pot. "Man, the guys up there are makin' $85,000, $90,000."

"Verne, I've already made $170,000 this year and it's only August."

Oh, he went crazy. "Uhh ... but ... wha ..."

Of course, Barnett was more than happy to put his two bits in and say, "Oh, yes. He's made at least

that much. Are you sure that's all you've made, Ole?" Barnett got a big kick out of having somebody making a lot more money than Verne could pay. He took it as a sign of his own success that he was able to pay me as much as he was, where Verne could only offer a fraction of that sum — in his "big territory up in Minnesota." I never went back to work for Verne. As much as I liked and respected Verne, I still thought we would clash. He was the boss and it would always be his way — or else.

Chapter 23
The Sawmill

I quit wrestling for the second time in December 1979. I was tired of the hassle. I was sick and tired of Barnett and his nonsense, so I told him that I was quitting and going home. A few weeks later, Barnett called and asked me to consider it a sabbatical, rather than actually quitting. He even had Eddie Graham call and attempt to talk me out of it. I was determined that I was getting out, so I packed up my bags and went back to Minnesota.

Now, you're probably wondering — why would I quit? Loving money as much as I did, and realizing that money was the only way I was going to get anywhere in this world — why would I quit? The answer is simple. I was completely filled up, burned up, and burned out. I had reached the point where I just had to get away. The people who know me will realize how serious that was

because I don't burn out easily.

In the back of my mind, I always had the idea of moving to Wisconsin and living in the woods. I thought I wanted to be a frontiersman, living like they did in 1820. I had been buying land in Wisconsin since 1970. At one point, I owned about 1,200 acres of land that was heavily covered with trees. While driving around one afternoon, I saw a man standing on the side of the road with a portable sawmill. It was a homemade job that he had built. I was really intrigued with it, so I asked him if he wanted to sell it. He did, so I bought it for $4,000. It was a piece of junk, but I got all excited about sawing a log. I later bought another sawmill for $10,000. The workmanship wasn't a whole lot better, but at least it was manufactured by a company, as opposed to one slapped together by a farmer. My next step was to buy a commercial sawmill. At that point, I had to get serious about the lumber business because I was now employing 15 to 20 people. The business was no longer just a toy that I could use for my own

entertainment. Up to that point, I only looked at it as a novelty — something that would keep me busy and allow me to make a few bucks. It was an alternative option to pounding the road as a wrestler.

From January through May 1980, in the coldest winter that Wisconsin had ever seen, all we did was work on setting the sawmill up. We had to buy the steel, do the welding, and set up the saws. It was a lot of work. I worked from dawn to dusk every day for four months in the miserable weather of Wisconsin. We finally got it all set up and ready to operate at the end of April.

In 1990, the sawmill did a gross of 1.8 million dollars, which translated to a profit of $400,000 and change. It was a nice little chunk of money. One year later, I was forced to close the sawmill when the guy who was running it for me wanted to move to Missouri. He was a good person and a super mechanic, so I bought 35 acres in Missouri, spending almost $500,000 to set the

business up and equip it with the necessary machinery.

To make a short story even shorter, I lost a lot of money. At that time, I normally had about 22 people on my payroll. Four or five of those people did a really good job. If I had been able to find five other people just like them, I would have made money and I would still be in business, but I didn't. I had four or five other employees who were passable. I had eight or nine others who barely did the work of one good worker. They were almost totally unnecessary, but I needed them because there were all kinds of rudimentary jobs that had to be done. I also had to keep extra people around to account for the ones who were screw-ups, or to fill in for the ones who didn't show up.

In 1991, I shut the sawmill down and auctioned everything off for a little more than $100,000.

Back to 1980. While I was still building my

sawmill business, I owned a home in Woodstock, Georgia, so I split my time between my home in Georgia and the sawmill in Wisconsin. During those first few months when I was setting the sawmill up, Jim Barnett called several times, wanting to know if I was ready to come back. Eddie Graham also called and suggested I go back. When Bill Watts called, wanting to know if I planned to go back, I said, "No, but don't tell anyone, just in case I change my mind."

I can only guess at what happened behind-the-scenes, but shortly after those phone conversations, Barnett hired Bill to book Georgia. I can't say for sure, but I would almost bet that Bill immediately called Barnett and suggested himself for the job. "You'd better forget about Ole coming back. I just got through talking to him on the phone."

Barnett called me during the second week in May and said, "My boy! Bill's not working out. Are you ready to come back?" I was itching to do

something besides loiter around my sawmill, so we reached an agreement. "Yeah, but I want $2,400 a week to handle the book, plus main event money. I also want a plane ticket to Wisconsin every other week." He agreed to it. That deal was too good to pass up, so I went back to work in Atlanta.

I started back with Barnett in May, but before six months had passed, our relationship became a little strained. Barnett tired of our arrangement for two reasons. One, there was a lot of money involved. Two, I was gone for a few days every second week, and Barnett didn't like the fact that I was spending so much time traveling back and forth to my sawmill.

In October, he suggested that I needed some help with the booking. His suggestion for assistant booker was Robert Fuller, so Barnett and I flew to Pensacola to meet with him. Robert picked us up at the airport and drove us to his home, where he introduced us to his wife, Sylvia. They had just

had a baby. Barnett cooed over it. "Oh, isn't that a cute baby." At first, I didn't say anything because the baby was as ugly as sin. I thought it looked like a furry monkey. Yeah, I know. How can anyone say that about a baby? I'm telling you — that baby was ugly. It looked like a miniature Jerry Seinfeld. "My God! Is that a baby, or did somebody take a dump in the basket?"

On the plane trip home, Barnett said, "Wasn't that a beautiful baby?"

"Are you goofy, Jim? I never saw anything so ugly."

He laughed and conceded the point. "No, she wasn't very good-looking, was she?"

I later heard that the girl turned out to be a beauty, so that just goes to show how much I know about babies.

Before we arrived back in Atlanta, Barnett said, "Robert will be a great help to you."

"Jim," I countered. "I'll do you one better than that. I'll just go home and you can let Robert book the whole territory. I'm outta here."

For the second time, I quit and returned to the sawmill.

Chapter 24
Spreading My Wings

In February 1981, Jimmy Crockett called and asked if I would be interested in booking the Carolinas. "What happened to George Scott?" I asked.

"I let George go."

"George has been working for you for a long time. You guys will get back together."

"No, George will never work for me again," he said, matter-of-factly.

"Jimmy, I'll talk to George if you want," I offered.

"Nope. There's no talking. He's out."

I flew down and talked to Jimmy about the booking job. I took him up on his offer because, once again, I missed the wrestling business, and I was really anxious to get back. In the meantime, George Scott got a phone call from Barnett and was offered the opportunity to book Atlanta. I believe George took over when Barnett got rid of Robert Fuller. Six months later, Barnett got rid of George. In August of that same year, when Barnett came to Charlotte to visit , he wanted to know if I would be interested in booking both territories — Atlanta and Charlotte. Well, having an ego as big as a house, I thought, Yeah, I can handle that. George was already gone, so I went for it.

A few years ago, George did an interview and made some statements that seemed to indicate that he was upset with me. I had replaced him in the Carolinas. Now I was replacing him in Georgia. I can see where those incidents might bother him, but I didn't have anything to do with the way things turned out. Regardless, George went on to book the Oklahoma territory for Leroy McGuirk, but the

territory was already on its way down and eventually went belly-up.

I was excited about booking both territories. The Charlotte territory expanded when Jimmy Crockett began running Toronto, Canada and Buffalo, New York. Georgia branched out into Ohio and two towns in West Virginia, Charleston and Huntington. It was a lot of work, but I was making a good living. In fact, I was probably making more money than some of the world champions. Jimmy was paying me two grand a week. I also got 2 percent of Charlotte, Greensboro, Asheville, and Winston-Salem. In addition, Barnett was paying me $2,400 a week, which was my old salary, and main event money. Moreover, I had 3 percent of Atlanta, 3 percent of Columbus, Ohio, and 5 percent of everything in Michigan — Saginaw, Grand Rapids, and Muskegon.

I really enjoyed that period of my life. Besides doing tremendous business, we had a great time. Our prime achievement was when we sold

out Greensboro, Atlanta, Columbus, and Charlotte — all in the same day. Barnett's standard line at times like that was, "Oh, you've done it again, my boy!"

Chapter 25
The Psychology of Booking

For a long time after I began booking, I made an attempt to come up with a finish for every match — in every town. I really put a lot of thought into everything I did, including all the finishes for the first few matches on each card. Later on, I got away from that because it became such a monumental job. Most people don't realize what a task that was. Taking care of every little detail in every little town is what drove me out of the business in 1979. Think about it. When I ran two territories, I was booking five and six towns a night, which translates to more than 30 matches every night.

Let's look at one day — let's say Monday. Greenville, South Carolina. Augusta,

Georgia. Charlotte, North Carolina. Calhoun, Georgia. They ran every Monday night. Fayetteville, South Carolina, ran every other Monday. That was just one night of the week.

We ran three towns every night in the Charlotte territory. On Saturday and Sunday nights, we ran as many as five towns. Atlanta ran two towns every night, and for a while, I ran three towns every night, except for Wednesdays. I ran two on Wednesday for a while, but then we cut it back to just one because a lot of people went to church meetings on Wednesday nights, especially in the rural areas. On Friday, we might run only two towns because we had the big show in Atlanta.

In addition to that, we taped TV on Tuesday in High Point and Wednesday in Raleigh. I did TV in Atlanta on Saturday, Columbus, Georgia, on Saturday, and Macon on Thursday. We also taped in Savannah, which would be on a Saturday, or an off-day, like a Thursday. For a time, we did a TV taping in Canada, where we would lay down four

shows in a row for airing on the following month. When WCW was still in business, they used to complain — "Jeez, we're doing three hours of TV a week."

I would say, "Big deal! I was doing eighteen, sometimes nineteen hours of TV — every week."

I eventually had to back off and quit worrying about the details of every finish. For the first two or three matches, I would just say, "Okay, this guys goes over, that guy goes over," or I would ask, "What did we do last week?" For the most part, it was very mundane stuff. There wasn't any attempt made at that point to have specific finishes for every match. On a seven-match card, I would take care of the last three or four matches.

Later on, when I was hired to work for WCW in 1989, Jim Herd had a booking committee, which was made up of Ric Flair, Jim Cornette and Kevin Sullivan. They asked me to help out. Several months later, Herd got rid of the booking

committee and, supposedly, had me take over the book. At that point, I gave finishes in every match because we were only running two towns a night, and the wrestlers were all big-money guys. There was nobody on the card who was only making 25 bucks. Everybody was making money. Because of that, every match was important to some degree. Everybody thought they were a star, and they were treated like stars. So for the most part, during that time, on an individual town basis, I came up with more finishes on a nightly basis than I had done in the past.

In the early 1980s, though, we almost always had three matches on every card that meant a little something. The only time I might not get too carried away would be on the spot shows. Spot shows also ran year-round, but we geared the spot shows more to having the people go home happy. Generally speaking, in a spot show that would run one to four times a year, our goal was primarily a matter of getting the babyfaces over. That was pretty much the rule of thumb and

our main focus. As long as we wouldn't be coming back to the town in the foreseeable future, the heels got all the heat they could get and the babyfaces were put over. Not only were they put over, but they had to be looking good and standing up at the end. The babyfaces couldn't win the match and be left for dead afterwards. That wouldn't work. The heels had to get their heat, then they had to take a licking and run out. That was our philosophy.

I can't think of an example where we didn't do it that way, so on the spot shows in particular, that eliminated five or six matches that I didn't have to give any thought to in terms of what the exact finish would be. However, we ran plenty of towns week after week where we did have to think about the finishes. We did have to think about what we were coming back with. We did have to think about the angles. We did have to think about our TV and try to figure out what we were going to do to make it draw again the following week.

When I was booking, I tried to analyze everything. A lot of the guys would look at the finishes I gave them and say, "Did you give any thought to ...."

I wouldn't even give them time to finish. "Don't you think I've already thought of everything you've mentioned?"

When I had both territories, Atlanta and Charlotte, I had all the talent listed on a big chart. I penciled the towns in at the top. It was a logistics nightmare. Every now and then, I would accidentally book someone in two towns. Ideally, I wanted to have someone like Roddy Piper in a certain town, but then I would think, Man, he'd be great in this other town. Of course, the two towns would be running on the same night, so I would have to choose between the two. I wanted him on the Canada TV, but I also wanted him on the Atlanta TV. Key in any name you'd like — Wahoo McDaniel, Ric Flair, Greg Valentine, Black Jack Mulligan. Or even myself! I would make the

Charlotte TV, which was taped in Raleigh on Wednesday nights. I made Atlanta TV on Saturday. I would also switch back and forth between the big shows, like Greensboro and the Atlanta Omni, but I couldn't be everywhere. It was awful. Can you imagine a movie director making five movies at a time? "I'll be on the set in Hollywood. The rest of you people just do the best you can to make those other movies."

At times, I would just leave instructions. "Here's what I want." Or I would get with the guys ahead of time and say, "Here's the finish I want and here's what you're gonna do." I would go over it with them a day ahead of time, or whenever it might be, and hope they got it pretty close to the way I laid it out. It was like the days when we all took instructions from Eddie Graham. We didn't always do the finish exactly the way he laid it out. Eddie was much more thorough than I was. He was more meticulous than I was. I might give you a finish that would last five minutes. Eddie would give you a finish that would

last the whole match. He could just go on and on and on, while I would just try to get the gist of the idea down and hoped the audience understood where I was going with it.

I had several people helping out. In the Carolinas, I handled most of it, and of course, Gene would take a lot of the finishes around. Stan Hansen and Ronnie West were the two guys who helped the most in Georgia. Ronnie knew what the finishes were in his towns, or wherever he was going. I might give Stan a few instructions about a match or two, or ask him to watch a particular match and report back to me on how it went.

Generally speaking, once a year, I would go up to Wisconsin to check on my property and business. Not only that, but I just liked to get away now and then and be away from things for a week. Before I left, I would get in touch with a few key guys, one of them being Stan, who I talked with almost every night. One story in particular stands out in my mind. I had Stan carrying the

finishes to a town when I made one of my trips to Wisconsin. "Stan," I said, "in the match with Dickie Slater, this is what I want. Dickie's gonna try to talk you into something else. If Dickie doesn't want to do what I've laid out, tell Dickie that he can go home. I don't give a damn what he says to you. Tell him that this is what I told him to do, and this is the way it's gonna be." True to form, Dickie would fuss and fume, but Stan was big enough to handle himself and lay down the law. He would say, "Well, this is what Ole wanted, so this is what we're doing."

Dickie always had a million finishes. I used to say, "Dickie, I don't need a million finishes. I just want an idea for one. Do you have one that we could use?" I mentioned this earlier. With Dickie, you had to start out at point A, which is what you wanted, and then you let him move to point B, point C, point D. He worked his way through the alphabet. At point Z, you said to Dickie, "You know what? I think this other thing is gonna work. Let's do this." And it would end up being

point A, the thing Dickie had refused to do for the last 25 letters. That scenario played itself out night after night after night.

I would call Stan almost every day. "How did it go?"

"We did what you said."

"How was Dickie?"

"Well, you know how Dickie is."

"Did he finally do what I wanted?"

"Yeah, yeah."

One week, before I got back from Wisconsin, I heard that Dickie had been complaining to Jim Barnett. Dickie supposedly said to Barnett, "Well, you know, Jim. I should have been the booker while Ole was gone. I'm giving these guys the finishes and they're not listening to me. It's not right. We have to tell 'em."

Barnett looked at him and said, "Well, Dickie. Maybe you think you should be the booker, but if the boys aren't listening to you, evidently, you're not the booker." Barnett came up with a few good ones once in awhile.

I used to ask the guys, "So everything went all right?" Of course, it was very difficult for me to get a reading from anybody who would say, "Yeah, it went well," because who really knows? I don't know if they were always capable of knowing what went well. It really didn't matter whether things went well or not. They were going to say they did just to keep me happy. That's exactly what we did with Eddie Graham. "Yeah, Eddie. We did it exactly as you outlined it for us." I'm sure every booker had the same problem, especially if he wasn't there. "Oh, yeah! It went exactly the way you wanted it!"

As time went by, I began to pick up ideas and I learned what did and what didn't work. As I said, even before I started booking, I always had an idea

in my own mind as to how things should run. Even before 1973, when I ran a few of my own programs in Charlotte, I would come up with finishes because I was tired of listening to Weaver's nonsense. Don't get me wrong. Some of his ideas were good, but a lot of the ideas were written in that book only because it was something they had done before. The book didn't differentiate between the good ideas and the bad ideas, or the ideas that drew money and the ideas that didn't. I used to laugh at the finishes that Kevin Sullivan came up with. He would remember something we had done in the past, but he never knew how to get into the idea. He just knew the punch line. The broad says, "Well, if that's the biggest you've got, I don't want any." What does that mean? That's the punch line to the joke, but I don't get the joke because you haven't told me the opening lines. That's the way a lot of people looked at finishes. They didn't understand the whole story leading up to the finish. All they knew was the punch line.

When I booked Charlotte, I did a lot of my work in the office. In Atlanta, I did almost everything at home. In fact, when I first started in 1976, I did all my work at home. After a few months, Barnett got a little upset with me because I didn't have a phone. "My goodness, Ole," he said. "Don't you have a phone?"

"No, Jim, I don't."

"Well, you work for me," he complained. "You'd think you would have a phone."

"Yeah, you'd think I would ... but I don't."

I had a very good reason for not having a telephone. I didn't want anybody calling me. If I had a telephone, it would ring off the hook and I would never get any work done. If I needed to call anybody, I went down to the office, but basically, I took care of business when I went to the towns. For the most part, I didn't go to the office, either. I didn't need to. The referees and

wrestlers all came to the office to get their booking sheets.

Gene's habit was to go to the office every day before seven in the morning. He would stay there until one or two o'clock in the afternoon and then leave to go home. I would do all the booking for the week and give a copy to Gene. He would run down to the office and give it to Freddie Miller, whose job was to type everything up and make out the individual booking sheets. When we went to the house shows, I would run the shows and give the finishes.

I eventually did get a phone, but only Ronnie West knew about it, and I told him to never tell anybody. Barnett walked by while Ronnie and I were talking one day. Barnett realized that Ronnie was talking to me, so when Ronnie hung the phone up, Barnett said, "Oh, so Ole has a phone?"

Ronnie hesitated, and then said, "Well, yeah."

"Well, what's his phone number?"

Ronnie wouldn't tell him. "Ole told me I can't tell anybody."

Barnett pooched his lower lip out and said, "Oh, you'd think he'd tell me."

Ronnie just refused to give Barnett the phone number. He wouldn't give it to anybody. Nobody got my phone number. I called who I wanted to call and that was the end of it. Nobody called me.

When it came to the booking, I did what I wanted to do. Nobody gave me any demands about anything. There again, I wasn't ever around the people in the office, so they didn't have much opportunity to tell me anything. In Charlotte, Jimmy Crockett hardly ever suggested anything. There were times when he might ask, "Do you think it's gonna work?" I would give him the most direct answer I could come up with. "Jimmy, I don't know." That was my

general attitude. "I think it's going to work, but do I want to guarantee it? No. Do I think it's good? Yes. Do I think it sucks? No, I think it's good." If Jimmy began to say anything like, "Well, I think —" I would cut him off and say, "I don't care what your ideas are. This is what we're going to do."

Ralph would occasionally make suggestions for their towns, but he never interfered. I never got much input from Barnett in regards to the booking, either, but he made an occasional suggestion or comment. At times, he might object to what I was doing. Tommy Rich, a young wrestler from Tennessee, was a good example of that.

When I first brought Tommy into Georgia, I had Abdullah the Butcher beat him in 30 seconds — less than a minute. As Abdullah left the ring, the referee came over to help Tommy up. Tommy told him that he didn't want any help. He brushed the referee away. "Just leave me alone. I can make it on my own." Of course, the people were standing

up, watching the drama unfold. I was listening to the people and gauging their reaction. When Tommy stood up, the people cheered and applauded.

The next day, Barnett went nuts. "Oh, my God! Fire him," he insisted. "Fire Tommy Rich. He's no good. You beat him."

"Jim, just wait."

The next week, I had Tommy do another TV interview. Tommy and Abdullah were scheduled in a rematch. Tommy went out and got whipped again, but it took a little longer for Abdullah to get the job done. Once again, Tommy refused help from the referee. That was Abdullah's second win over Tommy, but there was a variation. As Abdullah left the ring, Tommy grabbed the bottom rope and pulled himself to a seated position. He then grabbed the middle rope and pulled himself to his knees. He reached up one final time and grabbed the top rope. It was a struggle, but he

finally made it to his feet. The people went nuts!

Barnett said it again. "Oh, my God! You've killed him. He's no good. Just get rid of him."

Tommy did an interview on TV the next day, looking all bruised and beat up. "I've never been so humiliated. I know Abdullah is a tough man, but I got beat so bad that I'm embarrassed. I can't go home. My mom and dad didn't raise a boy like that. They raised me to fight. You might kill me, Abdullah, but I want to wrestle you again. I'll never, ever quit. I'm not gonna give up. I want another match." Once again, the people cheered and applauded.

In their next match, Abdullah beat Tommy up again. This time, when the match was over, I had Tommy reach out and grab Abdullah's leg. Abdullah kicked him off and turned around to leave. Tommy was badly beaten, but he began crawling and grabbed Abdullah's leg once again. Abdullah gave Tommy a kick and turned to

leave. As he turned away, Tommy grabbed him again. Abdullah kicked him once more and tried to leave. Tommy grabbed the leg a fourth time, and Abdullah went nuts! We didn't overdo it. Abby didn't kick him for an hour. He just gave him a few boots.

That's a subtlety that the wrestlers today don't understand. They run over their opponent with a cement truck. They shoot them with a .357 Magnum. They push them off a 20-story building. After all that, their opponent jumps right back up. That can't happen in real life — and I didn't do anything that couldn't happen in real life.

Tommy had his butt kicked again, but by the very act of grabbing a leg, and pulling himself to his feet without any assistance, he got the people on his side. He got on TV again and said, "I want to try him again." Rock Hunter, who was the manager for Abdullah, couldn't believe it. "Is that kid crazy? There's something wrong with that kid! We could have killed him. We could have

crippled him. We're not gonna wrestle him again."

At that point, Paul Jones walked in. That was the Paul Jones who was the promoter in Atlanta, not the wrestler from the Carolinas. He said, "Rock Hunter! I've got a blank contract here with your signature on it. You will meet Tommy Rich next week."

Rock Hunter went ballistic! Now the people were getting the idea. "Tommy Rich might have a screw loose, but he's a tough kid. We want to see it!"

Rock altered his attack. "All right, but it's not on my conscience. Whatever happens to Tommy Rich is brought on by you Paul Jones, you Gordon Solie, and by you people out there. Everyone that comes to the Omni — everyone that's watching at home — everyone who wants to see Tommy Rich back in the ring against Abdullah. You're all going to be responsible for whatever happens to Tommy Rich. When Abdullah is through, Tommy won't

ever wrestle again!"

In the next rematch, when the bell rang, Tommy threw a punch and staggered Abdullah. Abdullah didn't take a bump. He just staggered backwards. That was the first time Tommy had shown any real offense. The people were on their feet! The match continued and Tommy fought Abdullah like a wildman. Finally, Rock Hunter pulled Abdullah out of the ring and forfeited the match. Abdullah didn't seem to be in too much trouble, but Rock was worried that things might go wrong. Rock said, "That's it! We're not gonna wrestle Tommy Rich again. I don't care how many blank contracts you've got." We eventually brought them back in a rematch because "the people demanded it."

Somewhere in the process, the people got the idea that maybe, just maybe, Tommy Rich had a chance. That was my whole point. Tommy didn't look like much. He was a good-looking, young kid with a so-so body, but he was a kid with a lot of

guts, and that's how I sold him. That's how I put Tommy over. You couldn't put him over as Superman because he wasn't. In your wildest dreams, he wasn't. If you were on LSD, he still wasn't. His gimmick was showing everyone that he had these huge balls, and a heart that just wouldn't quit.

Tommy got over like a million bucks. Barnett had given up on him after the first night. "It won't work." And again after the second match: "It won't work."

Even though he had nothing to do with booking the events, Barnett would sometimes take credit for a good house. He made a comment in front of some people one night. "Oh, I guess my idea worked," and then glanced over at me. I didn't know what idea he was talking about, but it was evident that he was taking credit for the house being so good. I looked at him and asked, "Jim, are you gonna pay me?"

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Are you going to pay me?"

"Well, of course."

"Good! Then I don't give a damn whose idea it was."

Barnett liked to think that he knew the business. If Barnett had reservations about something I was doing, he might say, "Ole, do you really think that's going to work?" At times, he would be right, and I would come up with another idea. If Barnett did have any specific expertise in the business, to some degree, it was that he had an ability to spot talent. He was able to identify people who had the potential to be stars. Of course, that also was where his "expertise" stopped. Barnett wasn't wrong in his assessments, but knowing what to do with those potential stars was a different matter. He didn't know what to do with that talent after he recognized it. He was big

on Roddy Piper. He liked Tommy Rich. Did Barnett know that Tommy Rich was going to be a great talent, or did he like Tommy Rich because Tommy had blond hair and a smooth body? I don't know. I do know that Barnett wasn't that astute about what made things work. The thing I do know is that when I kicked off the angle between Tommy Rich and Abdullah, Barnett wanted me to fire Tommy. "Oh, you've killed him." In fact, it didn't. It made Tommy hotter than he had ever been.

If the manipulation had been left up to Barnett, he would have tried the old 1950s formula method to make Tommy a star. He would have featured Tommy on television and let him beat half of the people in the world in an attempt to make him the hottest babyface in the territory. At the same time, the heel that Tommy was going to work with would beat the other half of the people in the world, which would make him the most hated guy on the planet. He would then match Tommy against the heel, cross his fingers, and hope they made money.

I didn't look at it in those terms. I had Abdullah overwhelm Tommy Rich, but at the same time, made it look like Tommy was a fighter with a heart that wouldn't quit. That was what made Tommy Rich. Could we have done it the other way? I don't know, but Barnett didn't think I could do it the way I did.

On the rare occasion, Barnett would offer some input. As a for-instance, one night he said something like, "We need something new to spice things up a bit. Why don't we bring Roddy Piper into the territory." I didn't argue with him and I didn't deny that it was a good idea, but I didn't make it a habit to bring people in who would add unnecessary expense to the card. That was when Barnett did something that he had never done before. He gave Piper a $3,000 a week guarantee, a decision that I was vehemently opposed to. I didn't think we could justify the cost of flying Piper in, not to mention the guarantee, so I was against it. But by the same token, I realized that the kid had some talent and I thought we might make

some money with him, so I let it go.

Again, Barnett's "expertise" ended in regards to what we could do with someone like Roddy Piper. I liked Roddy because he was different. He had a gift of gab that was unique. If you wanted to stretch your imagination a little, he even looked like he could be a tough-guy wrestler. However, I had booked Piper for more than a year in the Carolinas. He did a few things there that gave me pause, making me wonder if I wanted to put all my eggs in Roddy Piper's basket. I didn't want to give him a full head of steam from the start because I had questions about what he might do under certain circumstances. For instance, I was concerned that he might eventually walk out on us. To counter that, I did something that I heard Vince McMahon did on occasion. He would compromise his new talent by beating them at first, just to see what their reaction to his decision would be. That's what I did with Roddy. I booked Roddy in a manner that got him beat on occasion, to keep him from totally overshadowing

everybody else. If my memory serves me, I had Roddy go broadway in his first match, a decision that Barnett was intensely opposed to.

That was another instance where Barnett shook his head and murmured, "Oh, my God." Once again, he was back to Tommy Rich. "You've killed him." In retrospect, though, that may have been a case where Barnett might have been right. I'm not sure how much sense it makes to spend that much money to bring someone in and then hold him to a draw. You can always look back and say, "Maybe we shouldn't have done that."

My point in saying all this was simply an example of the fact that I stuck to my guns when I believed in what I was doing, even if it meant going against Barnett or Crockett. I didn't let anyone talk me into doing anything that I didn't want to do ... until I went to WTBS in the '90s.

Chapter 26
The Third Man

I worked with a lot of good referees. The kid who was with me the longest was Ronnie West. Ronnie was a good referee. I could give Ronnie a finish or an idea so he could talk to the guys before the matches and get everything lined up, and it would be done the way I wanted it to be done. He came up with some good ideas on his own, too. I always liked Ronnie West, but I liked him more after the first time I fired him. After that, I liked him even more. How can you not like a guy who calls you God?

In the Carolinas, I thought Lucky Roberts, Angelo Martinelli, George Grant, and Sonny Fargo did a good job in the ring. I didn't realize it at the time, but I think Angelo Martinelli was probably the smartest one of the bunch. By the time I knew him, Angelo was older and had become a little bit

lazy. Ideally, the referee should get down on the mat to count. In fact, you should lay flat on the mat, but that was a little too much for him to do. At his age, he wasn't even too eager to get down on all fours. He didn't actually do it, but you would characterize him as the kind of guy who might tap you out with his foot, like a lot of referees did when they got older.

We poked a lot of fun at some of those old wrestlers, Angelo being one of them. I give him a lot of credit, though, because I watched him work one night and he really impressed me. We were short a man one night when somebody didn't make it to Greenville, so Angelo took his place in the second match. Gene and I watched his match and we were absolutely amazed. I was really impressed. Angelo just blew me away. I don't know what he worked like when he was young, but I don't think Angelo had ever been someone you could draw a lot of money with. I do know that the audience in the late '60s wouldn't buy a ticket to see a 50-year-old wrestler who had a big

belly. That being said, Angelo drew a tremendous response from the audience that night. He had a fantastic match. He put on something that the people found themselves believing to be a real wrestling match. He didn't do a lot of high spots, but what he did spoke volumes. I don't know how to describe what I saw that night — but I do know this. I couldn't do what I saw Angelo do that night, and I considered myself to be a fairly decent worker.

A lot of the veterans really surprised me, and I'm not just talking about people like Verne Gagne and Lou Thesz. One guy that I watched when I was in the Georgia territory was Pat O'Connor. I met him a few times when I was in Omaha, but I don't think I paid attention to any of his matches. In 1974, he had a great match in Macon, Georgia. Pat also was past his prime, but his match was very much like Angelo Martinelli's match. O'Connor didn't do a lot of punching and kicking. For that matter, he didn't do a lot of wrestling, either, but he was convincing with what he did do. He made it look

like a shoot and the people bought it. At least, I bought it. I was very impressed with him.

Lucky Roberts also did a good job as a referee in the Carolinas. In other respects, however, Lucky was a little bit less than desirable. After he took a shower, which was seldom, he would dry himself off with his socks. He would then put his socks back on, but only after he picked the jam out of his toes. He had a good head for the business, though. I could give him finishes and he would repeat them right back to me.

Tommy Young, a kid in Charlotte, also did a good job. The only thing I didn't like about Tommy was the fact that he began thinking that he was the star of the show. He had the idea that the referee should get a little exposure from an entertainment standpoint. Ric Flair encouraged that attitude in Tommy. Flair would push Tommy and then Tommy would push back — and Flair would take a bump. And Flair was the NWA champion! I used to hate that! I had another referee who began

jumping over the top rope when he entered the ring. I took him aside after the match and told him, "If you ever jump over the top rope again, make sure you take a big jump so you make it all the way to your house."

I used to tell the referees, "You're the last person anyone should remember in a match. Nobody should even realize you're there. You should handle yourself in such a way that you display command of the ring and the wrestlers, but nobody should remember anything other than the fact that they saw an exciting wrestling match."

On the other hand, the referee should never end up being the goat, or do something to influence the outcome of the match, like hold onto a babyface for 20 minutes while the heel hits the babyface with brass knuckles. Gene and I did the deal in tag team matches where I distract the referee by entering the ring illegally, while Gene hits the babyface behind the referee's back, but we did it in such a way that the referee could grab me, give me a push, and a

count of five. During that count of five, I would bail out of the ring. That was legit. But if I held the referee's attention for a count of 35, in the eyes of the audience, the referee is deliberately looking the other way. So it was incumbent on Gene, or whoever my partner was, and the other babyface, to do what they had to do quickly. Of course, if I'm holding the referee and my partner is throttling our opponent, the babyface on the other side of the ring eventually has to make a move to help his partner. He can stand and watch for a count of one, two, maybe even three, but then he has to make a move. If he doesn't, he looks like an idiot. At the end of the five-count, I get out of the ring. As the referee turns around, he catches the babyface coming in. If the heel and babyface couldn't do what they were going to do in that five-count time frame, then they made a mistake, but it made sense as long as the referee made it look like he was really making an attempt to maintain order in the ring.

Charlie Smith and Bobby Simmons were talented

referees in the Atlanta office. In 1974, I was walking down the hallway in Augusta. At the end of the hallway, I saw Charlie standing on a chair with his hand up over his head. At first, I couldn't tell what was going on, but Gene was doing something with the chair. As I got closer, I noticed a handcuff attached to Charlie's wrist. The other end of the handcuff was hooked to the door closer, which was at the top of the door. Gene was in the process of pulling the chair out from underneath Charlie's feet. I had an idea of what Gene had in mind, so I stepped my pace up a little bit. Before I could reach them, Gene yanked the chair away, leaving Charlie hanging by one wrist. That was pretty cruel and unusual punishment.

I stood there and watched that little scenario play itself out for several seconds, waiting for Gene to put the chair back underneath Charlie's feet so he could get a little relief. Hanging from that thin, metal handcuff, every ounce of Charlie's weight was centered on his wrist. I could just imagine how painful it must have been. In all fairness to

Charlie, he never said a word. He never yelled. He never hollered. He never said, "Ole, please get me down!" He never said, "Gene, damn you! Get me down!" Nothing. Nothing!

I finally said to Gene, "Dammit, Gene. Get him down from there." Gene didn't want to do it, but he began mumbling to himself as he picked Charlie up and pushed the chair underneath Charlie's feet. Gene got another chair, pulled a key out of his pocket, and then climbed up onto the chair and freed Charlie. I have no idea how Charlie allowed himself to get into that situation. Charlie might have just gone along with it, not knowing what Gene was going to do. Gene could do things that were a little bit off the wall, so Charlie might have gone along with it just to see what Gene had planned.

Now that I've had years to think about it, I realize that I probably should have left Charlie hanging there. He's been a pain in my ass ever since.

Chapter 27
Georgia on My Mind

In May 1982, Jimmy Crockett decided to let me go. There were two things that might have precipitated that. First of all, neither Barnett nor Crockett were happy with me booking both territories. They were concerned that I couldn't give my full effort to their respective territories. They were both correct in their assumptions. It was such an overwhelming job. I couldn't spread myself thin enough to do justice to either territory, even though I did make a serious attempt to do that.

In addition to that, people like Wahoo McDaniel were so certain that they could do better. Wahoo always thought he knew something about orchestrating the business, but he didn't. When he didn't want anybody to understand what he was talking about, he knew enough to say kayfabe, but

in terms of knowing the business from a booking standpoint, he just didn't have a clue. I used to get on his case all the time. He would come up with an idea and I would say, "Where did you get that dumb idea from?" Of course, he would run to Crockett to complain about me.

Another guy who was crying to Jimmy was Black Jack Mulligan's kid, Barry Windham. Barry turned out to be just like his dad — completely screwed up in the head. When Barry was having some serious personal problems, Jimmy took him in and took care of him. He put him up in a motel and gave him a car to drive. Barry stormed in one day and began yelling, just like his dad used to do. "I know what you're trying to do. I know what you're trying to do." He stood there with his hands on my desk, shaking his head up and down.

"What's the matter, Barry?"

"I know what you're trying to do, Ole." He just kept repeating that phrase. "I know what you're

trying to do." He was talking like the town idiot. "You're trying to bury me," he accused.

I don't remember the entire conversation, but I do remember picking up my booking pad. It was a huge pad with large squares printed on it. I said, "Here! You're right. I'm burying you. Take a look at how I planned to bury you."

When I did my booking, I would book as far as 45 days ahead. I had Barry booked on top with Bob Remus, Sgt. Slaughter. He was booked on top everywhere! He had just come into the territory and I had him booked with Sgt. Slaughter, one of the hottest guys in the territory. After Barry finished looking at my notes, I said, "Maybe you think I wrote all this down between the time you opened the door and the time you reached my desk, just to swerve you. No, I couldn't have done that, so you have to believe that this is what I had planned. In fact, this has been planned for several weeks. Take a look at it again."

Greenville — he was booked on top with Sgt. Slaughter. Richmond — he's on top with Sgt. Slaughter. He's booked in Roanoke — with Sgt. Slaughter. In addition, I had an idea worked out for a return match, and matches in the weeks after that. I was booked five or six weeks ahead — and he was in the main event everywhere. I said, "What is it about my plans that you don't like?" He was so screwed up that he couldn't answer.

When I got the axe, my guess was that Wahoo, and maybe one or two other people, were very upset over what they thought was happening — or what might happen. You see, anytime you took aside someone who had been on top and suggested that they might want to think about going somewhere else, that was like the kiss of death. I was guilty of being stupid when George Scott wanted me out of the Carolinas. Naturally, I took it personally because I didn't want to make a move. Nobody wanted to move their family. Nobody wanted to move out of their

house. And, of course, everybody wanted to make big money.

For whatever reason, Jimmy Crockett decided to bring Dory Funk Jr. in to replace me as the booker. Jimmy didn't make that decision because business wasn't good. Business was very good during that time. We sold out Greensboro for the first time in a long while and business throughout the territory was up. We were also selling out the Omni at the same time. I always suspected that Wahoo was involved in orchestrating that, along with a few other people. There was a little bit of heat there between us. Eight years later, when I went to work for WCW in Atlanta, the heat was still there with Wahoo.

I only worked with Dory one time. I couldn't tell you what the match was like because I don't remember, but I can tell you that I loved to watch Dory work. I enjoyed watching him work with anyone, but particularly with Jack Brisco. In the ring, Dory was untouchable. He was great. When

he was in the ring, he never did anything that exposed the business. His performances were solid, solid, solid. In 1993, when Ted Turner owned WCW, we had a legends night at the Omni. I booked Dory against Nick Bockwinkel. Dory and Nick were older and not in the best of shape. At the time, I was 51 years old. Nick was at least that old and Dory was my age or older, but that didn't matter. Nick and Dory had a spectacular match. The people were completely mesmerized by it. They were glued to their seats and really got involved in it. When the match was over, you could hear the people buzzing, "Now that was wrestling."

On the other hand, as flawless as Dory's proficiency was in the ring, his ring knowledge didn't translate into booking ability. It didn't with a lot of people. I hate to use the cliché, but Dory's booking was as exciting as watching paint dry. Perhaps I should use another illustration. His booking was as exciting as watching a doorknob turn. I used to joke with Dory and his brother,

Terry. "It's really a shame. You two had to become world champions to make a buck because neither of you know how to book your own territory."

Dory wasn't alone in that regard. There were a lot of great workers who couldn't book. Harley Race knew how to work, but I didn't agree with the way he booked. Jack Brisco could work, but I don't think he ever booked. Jerry Brisco could work a little bit, but if he ever booked anywhere, he didn't have much success. There were so many guys who just didn't have an idea of how to make the business work.

Dory and Terry's father, Dory Funk Sr., ran the Amarillo territory for many years. I only knew Senior for a short time, but he was an energetic guy. He would give 122 percent in every match. He wanted everybody to know that he had what it took to do whatever needed to be done. He didn't have to convince me. He would go like a ball of fire. I had just one match with him as my

partner — a six-man tag team match with Bobby Duncum as the third man on our team. I don't remember who our opponents were, but once Funk tagged in, he wouldn't tag out. He wanted to show everybody that he was able to stay in the ring the whole time — and that's just about what he did. It didn't bother me. I got paid the same no matter what I did. Funk was an interesting guy. He said things to the promoters that, at the time, would have caused even me to bite my tongue just a little bit.

Senior was smart enough to make his territory work, but Terry and Dory Jr. just didn't have the knack. They didn't know much about manipulation. I saw it first-hand when Dory Jr. and Terry brought me out to Amarillo to book a big show they were putting on. I took some of the younger kids from Atlanta with me.

I want to stress this next point, though. Whatever talent Dory Funk Jr. lacked in the manipulation department, he more than made up for in the ring.

Terry Funk also did a great job as the NWA world heavyweight champion. He was probably one of the best there was in the ring. He could do everything as a wrestler. On the other hand, there were moments when he got carried away and did some crazy things. At times, he did things that looked like they came right out of Tennessee — absolute cartoon nonsense. In fact, I didn't want to use him for that reason. Could Terry Funk be a good worker? Yes. Was Terry Funk a good worker? Yes, but not always. There were times when he did things in the ring that were so cartoonish that it would blow your mind, not to mention exposing the business.

Terry had a match in Augusta with Bob Armstrong. It was one of the most horrible matches I had ever seen in my life. As the amount of time allotted to their match begins to expire, they do a double knockout. Terry falls out onto the floor on one side of the ring. Bob falls out on the other side. They're both lying on the ground. Terry staggers to his feet and looks

around. He doesn't see Bob, so he ducks back down. Bob stands up and looks, but he doesn't see Terry, so he ducks back down. They both crawl under the ring. They pass each other under the ring, but they don't see each other. Terry comes out on the other side of the ring, where Bob had just been. He looks up. He doesn't see Bob, so he ducks back down. Bob now comes out on the side where Terry had been. He doesn't see Terry, so he ducks back down. They both go back under the ring a second time, only this time, they run into each other and start fighting underneath the ring. Of course, they're both laying on their backs, kicking the hell out of the underside of the ring. The boards are flying up, the ring is shaking — that kind of nonsense. After this big confrontation under the ring, they both come staggering out, on opposite sides of the ring again. They both stagger backwards around the ring until they have another double knockout, hitting back to back, head to head. They stagger all the way around the ring again and have a double knockout from the front.

That was it for me. Afterwards, I told Bob, "If you ever do anything like that again, you're fired." I knew it wasn't Bob's fault. I knew he was just trying to go along with Terry. I couldn't wait to see Barnett. "Don't book Terry again. I want him the hell out of here."

Terry had the ability, but Terry would sometimes exhibit a complete lack of respect for his own business. He used to do a routine where he would pound his own head into the turnbuckle until he knocked himself silly, and then he would take a little bump backwards. What kind of foolishness was that? Terry was out in Vegas for one of the NWA promoters' meetings. He was the world champion at the time, so he made a little speech. Terry talked about how his fellow wrestlers acted like idiots. They didn't conduct themselves with the dignity and decorum that was becoming a professional wrestler. As a result, he was embarrassed and hesitant to tell people that he was a wrestler. Later that night, while we were sitting at the bar, we heard a commotion going on

in the background. A male voice was growling and barking like a dog. You could hear the women squealing, "Ohhh! Oooh!" As we stood up to see what the commotion was all about — there's Terry — in his suitcoat, and on all fours, biting at the rear ends of the waitresses. "There's our champion," I said. That was Terry Funk.

When I heard that Dory was in Charlotte, Jimmy Crockett began to hem and haw. He was trying to find the words to break the news to me. I allayed his fears. "Jimmy, if you want to make a change, just say so. I won't argue about it."

"Yeah, I'd like to see how Dory does," he explained.

When Jimmy said that, I told him, "Fine, Jimmy. I have no problem with that. If you want me to stay for a couple of days, a week, or whatever, and help with the transition, I will. If not, I'll be gone tomorrow."

As best I can remember, his reply was, "Well, let's just end it right now."

I packed up my personal belongings and drove back to Atlanta. I couldn't have cared less. I was happy to be going home to my wife and my kids. To be completely honest, I had reached the point where the workload had become too heavy. I was booking the biggest territory in the world — Georgia, Charlotte, Toronto, Ohio and Pennsylvania. I was programming more than 100 wrestlers in Charlotte and another 50 wrestlers in Atlanta. Just listing everybody on the charts to be sure I didn't double-book anybody was a major chore. I was running myself ragged. It was a repeat of what I had been doing three years before.

Jimmy and I stayed on good terms. He called and asked for some help a couple of years later, so as far as I knew, there were no problems between us. Jimmy got rid of Dory pretty quickly and brought Dusty Rhodes in to book. Jimmy thought Dusty created the world in five days. He was too

dense to realize that Dusty was putting his business right into the toilet, which Dusty eventually did. There's no question about it. Dusty had a lot of good ideas, but like a lot of the bookers, he couldn't tell the difference between a good idea and a bad idea. He would use any and every idea he came up with, in the hopes that something might accidentally work. Unfortunately, a lot of it didn't.

Chapter 28
Hiring and Firing

When I started wrestling, there were a lot of guys around who would tell the promoters to go screw themselves. In fact, I was one of them. I already explained the reaction I had to Verne when he asked me to become a referee. Most of the people who were asked to referee agreed to do it. They thought that was part of the price you paid to get into the business. I wasn't going to do that. Having been in that position, I didn't take offense when someone refused to do what I asked them to do. If someone didn't like my idea, I was very understanding and kept things uncomplicated. "You're fired!"

When I was booking, everybody knew up front that they were expected to do what I asked them to do, or they could find another place to work. For the most part, I think Verne Gagne and Eddie

Graham both kept a tight rein over their territories. The boys did what they asked them to do — or they were gone. I think even Jim Crockett Sr. fell into that category. Crockett had so many stooges hanging around that everybody was deathly afraid of him, even though I figured out old man Crockett in the first month. I knew how far I could go when I complained about things. I did a lot of goofy things and I played it pretty close on occasion, but I didn't walk up to him and say, "Hey, you big, fat tub of lard." I might have stepped onto the edge a few times, but I was smart enough to know where that line was.

Many of the people in the wrestling business never gave much thought to why they did what they did. If things didn't come easily, they didn't follow through. If I implemented an idea, then I believed in what I was doing. I didn't say things just to hear the words echo around in my head. I didn't try out an idea as an experiment, just to see if it might work. I always had a reason for what I did, and in most cases, I had already analyzed the

plan thoroughly.

Mark Lewin was a good example of that. Lewin was assumed to be one of the smartest guys in the business, and he was supposed to be a great worker. Could he work better than most people? Sure! Did he have more charisma than most people? Certainly he did. Was he smarter than a lot of people? Maybe so. Did he have a lot of ideas? Probably so. But, when you analyzed some of the things he was doing, they didn't make a bit of sense. He did certain things that were so nonsensical, they negated anything else he did that might have been worth anything.

Lewin and Barnett were always tight. "Markie boy." Years before, Lewin and Frankie Cain had been a big attraction in Australia for Barnett, so Barnett wanted both of them to come into Atlanta. I had heard a lot about Lewin, but I didn't know him personally. I knew Frankie Cain, who wrestled as the Great Mephisto. I thought he did a good job. I had no problem with him.

Mark Lewin did the crazy gimmick, acting like a nutcase — but he wasn't crazy before he got into the ring. He was only crazy after he got into the ring. When he walked into the arena, he was wearing a three-piece Brook Brothers suit and Gucci shoes. He sported diamond rings, a diamond necklace, and a $10,000 Rolex watch.

That's the description of someone who was supposed to be nuts?

After I saw Mark work in the ring for the first time, I pulled him aside. "Mark, who in the hell can believe this crap? It's crazy! If you want to be nuts, I'm all for it. I don't have a problem with the idea, but here's what I want you to do. Don't come to the arenas wearing a three-piece suit. Don't talk to the fans, either. If you absolutely have to do that, then subdue it a little bit. Keep it to a minimum. When you finally get into the ring, you have to be normal — maybe for ten or fifteen minutes, and maybe not in every match — but somewhere, at the end of however many minutes,

you get hit in the side of the head. At that point, you begin to act a little goofy. Don't get carried away. Mephisto jumps up on the ring apron and talks to you for a few seconds, then you begin to come out of it. Sell it like temporary insanity. Just give us a hint of it. We just need a little bit. We can smell a small amount of shit just as much as we can smell four hundred ash barrels of it. Let the people slowly catch on to your gimmick. It might take some people four or five weeks before they say, 'You know what? There's something wrong with that guy.' I don't want you to come out and tell everybody, 'When I was in Vietnam, I took a bullet wound in my head and they took out half of my brain.' Let them draw their own conclusions."

That's one of the problems with the business today. Nobody is willing to take the time to let the people figure out what's going on. They want to tell the people, "I'm a heel. I'm a real bad-ass!" Or, "I'm a good guy." A lot of the guys think that way. They think that as long as they tell the people, "I'm a heel or a nasty bastard," they'll

have a lot of heat. If they tell them they're a babyface, or a nice guy, they'll really be over and the fans will love them. That is so asinine. Why can't they understand that what they're doing just doesn't make sense.

I had one particular rule that there was no question about: When I started wrestling, Verne Gagne made it clear from the very first day that babyfaces and heels don't ever ride together. Gene and I were so adamant about adhering to that rule that we didn't ride with anybody. Once in awhile, we took someone else with us, but generally speaking, if we made 200 trips, it was just Gene and me on 199 of them. I think, for the most part, the referees rode with the babyfaces because that made more sense than traveling with a heel. I wouldn't have encouraged a referee to ride with a heel, but I don't know that I would have told them that they couldn't, either. The referee has to get a ride with somebody. Regardless, you don't ride together in a car with your opponent. Never! Ever! End of

conversation.

Lewin was working a program with Abdullah the Butcher. They were both heels, but they had a series of matches with each other. While I was riding to Augusta with Louie Tillet, we saw Abdullah's car. As we pulled up beside them, we saw Frankie and Lewin in the front seat. Frankie was driving, but Abdullah was nowhere to be seen. Louie said, "That's strange. Why would they be driving Abby's car?" When we honked the horn, Abdullah sat up in the back seat and looked out at us. He laid right back down.

We arrived at the building before they did, so when they pulled up, Louie and I were waiting and watching. Frank and Mark got out and walked into the building. Three minutes later, Abdullah sat up and got out of the car. Before the matches began, I took the three of them aside and told them, "You're fired." They didn't work that night.

The next day, while I was talking to Barnett, he

got a phone call from Lewin. Lewin, of course, was pleading his case. Barnett says, "Well, you know, Markie boy. Ole is the booker." That was the end of that. Mark Lewin was gone.

I had another rule that I enforced. I required the guys to arrive at the arena an hour ahead of time, and I expected everybody to stay until the show was over. I got lax in later years because things were so screwed up, but I wanted the guys to hang around, especially the underneath guys. How else were they going to learn their craft? I wanted the top guys to stay around, too. If someone had trouble getting out of the ring, what would they do if there was nobody around? Verne did it that way. We always hung around. There were times when we were in Minneapolis that some of the guys would bug out early because they lived there, but basically, when we were on the road, everybody stayed around until the end of the last match. I wanted everybody to hang around for those two reasons — to help the guys out of the ring if they needed it, as well as to be able to teach

the young guys. At that time, we still had guys who were willing to help a young guy. We also had young guys who were dumb, but smart enough to realize they were dumb and needed help. I would tell them, "Hey, watch this match. See what you like and what you don't like. Try to incorporate it into what you do. Don't follow everything piece by piece, but see what gets over and what doesn't get over. You can tell what's getting over by listening to the people."

Teaching by example and the willingness to learn was such a big part of our business. To me, the lack of that has been the demise of our business. It certainly was with WCW, and I suspect, it eventually will be with the WWF. Too many of the guys do not know their craft. They do not know what they're doing.

I did have another rule that I didn't allow the boys to bend. I didn't want them bringing their wives to the matches, although I suppose there were times when some of the wives made it in and

I didn't know it. Charlie Harben gave me some advice one time. "If you have a job operating a bulldozer, do you bring your family and let them sit on the side of the ditch and watch while you work? The wrestling business is no different. This is your job, so your family shouldn't be watching you here, either." So that was my rule. When I started booking, I told everyone, "I don't want any wives at the matches. For that matter, I don't want any girlfriends here, either."

Many times, having the wives and families at the matches would lead to problems. Eventually, the fans would see my wife sitting with your wife. My opponent and I were in the ring, beating the hell out of each other, while our two wives are chatting with each other in the grandstands. "What are you going to do for Christmas?" "When is Johnny having his birthday party?" The people would see and hear that. Then, of course, the wives have to go pee. They get in the bathroom and another woman says, "You're Mrs. So-and-so, aren't

you? Isn't wrestling fake?" Sometimes, to avoid a lengthy conversation, the wives would just say, "Yes, it's all put on."

We were also under the belief at the time, and I think it was valid, that if the arena rats were coming to the arenas, we were doing big business. The arena rats were a good indicator of how good the business was doing. If the rats weren't at the building, then things probably weren't going well. We told the guys to screw all the girls. "Screw them all. I don't want you playing any favorites. I want you to screw all of them. If you have a favorite, keep it to yourself. Don't tell anyone that you have a favorite. You don't tell your wife, do you? You don't have to make it known to anyone else, either." We felt that would make for better business. By and large, I think it did.

Like anything else, no matter what rules I might have had, the wives might have come in occasionally, but hopefully not so much that it

made an impact on our business. Apparently, it didn't happen enough for me to hear about it, because if I had known about it, I would have fired the guy involved.

I must have fired everybody in the business at one time or another, but if they were talented, I also hired every one of them back again. When they came back, I always told them, "Listen, this is the way we're gonna do it. You're probably gonna do it a little bit differently than the way you think it should be done, but do what I tell you to do and do it as good as you can. If you don't, I'm gonna chew your ass out. If I make a mistake, and the angle doesn't work right, I'll know it. I'll know it because the people won't come to the building. If I screw up, I'll do everything that I can possibly do to unscrew it. I'll do my best to get you over because the whole purpose of me being here is to make money. If you make money, I'm gonna make money. I don't want to see you lose money due to something I said or did. I do make mistakes, but if you do what I tell you to do, things should work

out." Everybody was happy with that. I tried to do what was good for the business. I may not have always been successful at making what I did good for the business, but I sure tried to the best of my ability.

There were a few people who would stand up for themselves. I mentioned Paul E. Dangerously in an earlier chapter. When I was working for Turner, I told him, "This is the way I want you to do it. If you don't like it, pack up your bags and get out of here." He packed his bags and he left. I never saw him again. I never talked to him again. I will tell you this, though: Paul E. Dangerously is a good example of the way the guys used to be. I'm not trying to put a feather in Paul E's cap because I thought he was a jerk, but at least he had the strength of his own convictions. There were very few people who were man enough to stand up to the promoters.

On occasion, I also had to tell the guys, "I have so much to do that I don't have time to listen to

everybody's ideas." At one time, I was running more than a hundred guys. How could I talk to everybody? If you give everybody five minutes, the day is gone. From time to time, though, I would listen, because my brains were fried. I would ask for their input. "Does anybody have any ideas?" I would listen to their ideas. If someone gave me an idea that I went with, it was as good as if I came up with it myself. If it didn't work, it was my fault because I had agreed to do it. I never would blame the guy who made the suggestion — ever! There were times when I said, "Hey, it's my fault. I agreed that what you suggested was the right thing to do. Since it didn't work, it was the wrong thing to do or we screwed it up in the process, but I don't blame you because I'm the one who agreed to do it. I'm the guy who put the thing into motion. I'm the person responsible for it."

I fired Abdullah, but I took him back in a heartbeat. I fired Buzz Sawyer, but I hired him back. I might fire a guy and let him stay out for two or three months, but then I was glad to have

them back again. While their transgression may not be forgotten, if the guy had any talent at all, the fact that he screwed up one time didn't mean anything to me. I took more crap from Black Jack Mulligan than anyone. Bob and I had been at cross-hairs since 1975, but when he needed help, I brought him back. You're looking at almost 20 years of problems between us, but the fact that he sucker-punched me a few times didn't keep me from hiring him back because he was good for business. He had some great matches, especially with the Iron Sheik.

I fired Ronnie West and Les Thatcher one time because they got an attitude. In fact, I fired them at the same time. They both worked for me as referees, and sometimes, they promoted small towns. From time to time, Ronnie and Les would tell everybody how smart they were, or how important they were. They told people that a lot of the angles I was doing came from them, so I called Ronnie and Les and laid down the law. "I know you're telling everybody all kinds of crap. Stop

spreading the bullsh–!" It wasn't a day later that I heard that they were complaining to everyone and making noise about their pay. At that time, Ronnie was probably making as much as $1,800 a week, and Les was doing pretty good, but they didn't think that was enough.

Being the caring, compassionate soul that I am, I called Ronnie and Les into the office and asked them both to sit down. I said, "You know, guys. I feel so bad. I've paid you so poorly during the past year that I just can't live with myself anymore." They both had a little smile on their lips. You could almost see the wheels turning in their heads. "Oooh. Here comes a raise."

"I just want you to know that I can't live with myself the way things are. So ..." At that point, I gave it a nice, long pause, before I continued. "So ... today, as of this very moment, you're both free to find employment wherever you can. You can go get the money that you feel you're entitled to." The two of them almost fell out of their chairs.

Ronnie was going, "Aahh, uhh ..."

Les was going, "Yaah, uhh, aahh ..."

"No-ooooo!" I added. "No, no, no. Please don't thank me. The least I can do is let you guys become free agents so you can find employment and better pay elsewhere."

That was it. I got rid of both of them. Ronnie went to work for Crockett in the Carolinas. He called me a month or two later. You'll have to talk to Ronnie to find out exactly how it went because I'm not quite sure, but I don't think I hired him back that soon. I know I hired him back when I went to work for Turner. That was when Ronnie began to call me "God."

"Yes, God. Yes, God."

There were other guys who called me God, but Ronnie was the one who got that started.

I didn't realize it at the time, but after I hired

Ronnie back, he was constantly worried about losing his job again. It all came to a head one day when we arrived in Jacksonville, Florida for a show. This was in 1990 and we were both working for Turner. Ronnie fell down onto the floor of the airport as we were rushing to catch a cab to the Jacksonville Coliseum. "Ronnie! What's the matter with you?," I asked. "Are you all right?" As we helped him to his feet, I repeated myself, "Are you all right?"

He just mumbled, "Yeah, I'm okay."

I urged him on. "Then come on. Let's go."

Ronnie worked that night, but the very next day, they put him in the hospital. They discovered that he had suffered a heart attack. We never considered that. He was only 30-something, so I never gave a heart attack a thought. If I had known that, I would have driven him to the hospital myself, but that scenario never dawned on me. "Get off your ass and let's get to

Jacksonville." At the time, he was so afraid that I would tell him, "Well, if you can't make it, you're out of work. You're fired." When Ronnie recovered and came back to work, he continued to call me God.

Years earlier, when I first started booking, I fired Bob Armstrong and Robert Fuller because Barnett told me that they were saying things behind my back. Barnett said, "You can't keep them around, Ole. I think you need to get rid of them." I took Barnett at his word and I fired them. The things that Barnett told me about Armstrong and Fuller weren't true, but I didn't discover that until later. Barnett was testing me, trying to determine how susceptible I was to his schemes. As I said, that was when I first started booking, so I was kind of green, not yet aware of the monkey business that took place behind-the-scenes.

Bob Armstrong was a good guy. We talked at a later date and I realized that I had been had by Barnett. Barnett loved to create misery. He was a

real prick. Actually, I'm using the wrong gender there, but again, we'll leave it at that.

I don't think you can find too many instances of someone missing a booking. Everyone knew that if you didn't make the town, you didn't have a job. David Shultz called me one day and said he wanted to wrestle in Georgia over the Christmas holidays. He said he needed the work. He wanted to work for ten days, so I booked him.

He didn't even show up.

He called me again the following year. Once again, he wanted to work. I said, "Fine, I'll give you five dates." This time, he showed up. When he walked in the door, I said, "Now we're even."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, last year I booked you, and you didn't show up. This year, you showed up, and I didn't book you."

He thought he had gotten away with it, but he didn't. It just took him a year to find out that he didn't get away with it. Oh, he was hot! He was going to kill me. He was going to shoot me. He was going to do all kinds of nasty things to me. If I had a nickel for everybody that was going to kill me, I would be so rich that I wouldn't have to lift a finger for the rest of my life.

Stu Hart's kid, Bret Hart, missed a shot in Augusta. The next day, he came to the office and fed me a story about getting lost, or whatever his excuse was. I gave him the benefit of the doubt. The next night, he was booked in Macon — and he missed that! Once again, on the following day, he walked into the office to give me another excuse for why he didn't make it on Tuesday. "I'll tell you what," I explained. "Don't worry about tonight."

"Well, where am I gonna be?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "I don't know."

"Well, am I working somewhere?"

"I haven't any idea."

"Well, what's running tonight?"

"Columbus is running."

"Am I booked there?"

"No."

"Why aren't I booked there?"

"Listen," I said. "On Monday, you were booked in Augusta — and you didn't make it. On Tuesday, you were booked in Macon — and you didn't get there. Tonight, you're not booked in Columbus — but by the same token, I'm not lookin' for you. If you show up, that's your business. Buy a ticket and come on in."

A few days later, Stu Hart called me. "Eccch ... you ... ehhh ... fired my boy."

"Stu. He didn't make the towns. I can't operate like that." Stu was a little upset about it, but that was the end of it. The kid never worked for me again.

I fired Roddy Piper on a Sunday afternoon after he was supposed to make a little town outside of Atlanta. It might have been Calhoun. He called up and said, "Tommy Rich and I are in town and we're on our way." We held up the show. They called back about 30 minutes later. When they still failed to show up, they called again. They never made it. Later that night, we were in Marietta. Piper and Tommy walked in, acting as if nothing had happened.

I said to Piper, "Just pack your bag and get the hell out of here." Of course, he was losing a $3,000 a week guarantee, so he gave me a little lip. I said, "I'll tell you what. I'll call the cops in here right now and they'll search your bag, then they'll search your car. By the time you get out of jail, I'll be calm enough to talk about it." He was

stuck. He knew he had a problem. He had missed the town that afternoon, which was enough reason for me to fire him, but I knew it was because he was all screwed up. He had no valid reason to miss the town. Sure, if you were in a car accident and everybody got killed, I guess you could miss it, but nobody missed a show when they were working for me. Having missed it, and knowing the reason he missed it, I had no problem with saying, "That's it. You're fired."

I let it be a lesson for Tommy. "Tommy, I can fire you right now, or you can shape up and work." Tommy was scared to death, so he straightened up for a time, but Tommy was already messed up to the point where it didn't scare him enough because he kept on doing it. It got so bad that he walked in one night and threatened to beat the hell out of me. How screwed up do you think he had to be to think he could do that? At one point, near the end of 1984, Tommy and Nick Patrick were both going to jump me.

Everybody else made the towns every night. I can't think of another instance besides Paul Orndorff, who didn't show up in Augusta one Saturday night. Paul got hurt the night before. I don't remember if it was his leg, arm, or what. It didn't make any difference to me what it was. I told him, "Okay, here's the plan. As long as you can walk, you go to the town. You've been advertised, so you make an appearance and show the people that you're there. I don't want them to think you're at home drinking beer and watching television. You're important to them. They paid to see you. Even if you don't wrestle, they deserve to see you. I want them to realize that you're hurt, but I also want them to see that you're determined to be there. If nothing else, they think you're there to give moral support to the guy who is standing in for you. You don't have to get involved in the match. In fact, I don't want you involved in the match. I just want the people to see that you're there."

He didn't show up.

We were in the Omni on the following night. When he walked into the back that night, I stopped him before he got to the dressing room door. I said, "Paul, you're finished," and I walked him to the back door. I escorted him outside and closed the door. He was really hot at me. I did it that way because I was concerned that he might walk out through the crowd and wave at the people on his way out. I was really disappointed because I liked Paul. We were planning to do big things with him. We were really giving him a push. Paul was going to be my big star.

A year or so later, Paul was working for Vince McMahon, and he was still hot at me, to a point where I thought some type of altercation would eventually take place between us. A few years ago, before Rick Rude died, Paul and Rick showed up by my boat dock on Lake Hartwell. Paul said, "We sure wish you were running things again."

I was absolutely dumbfounded. I couldn't resist asking, "Why?"

"Because you didn't put up with any bullsh–," Paul answered. "Now the business is so out of whack. Everybody is running their own deal and screwing everything up because they don't know anything about promoting wrestling. It's chaos down there in WCW. The guys show up whenever they feel like it and take off whenever they want. Now I understand where you were coming from when you fired me, but I didn't see it at the time."

I've had so many people tell me that. To this day, Stan Hansen puts me over like a million dollars. Stan used to say, "You know, you were a difficult guy to deal with, but at least we knew what you were thinking. We knew what you wanted because you didn't bullsh– us. You didn't tell us a bunch of cockamamy stories and then screw us in the ass. You just screwed us in the ass." Well, that was one of the nicer compliments I had received.

And that's true. As a for-instance, if someone

didn't do what I said, I fired them. And they always knew why they got fired. If they were doing what I told them to do, why would I fire them? I fired them because they wouldn't do what I told them to do.

On the other hand, as I've already said, at some point in time, I rehired just about everybody that I ever fired. It was just a matter of getting my point across to them. "Okay, this is really easy to follow. You've gotta do what I tell you to do. If you don't, I'm gonna fire your ass again." That's all there was to it.

The only exception to that was Thunderbolt Patterson. I first met Thunderbolt when I worked with him in Charlotte in 1972. I have to admit. Thunderbolt was one hell of a draw. He could draw with anybody. He drew with me. He drew with Rip Hawk. He drew with any of the heels we put against him. We always made money when Thunderbolt was on the card. He really worked the fans up with his charisma and his style

of wrestling. However, it wasn't long before he became more and more convinced that it was his ability alone that got him over. Thunderbolt developed the same attitude that Dusty Rhodes developed when Dusty really got over. All of a sudden, he no longer needed anybody else.

Once that attitude took over, Thunderbolt constantly complained that he was getting screwed on the payoffs. I remember one time in particular. I asked him, "What did you make last week?" He made $3,200. I said, "Well, I only made 2,800 bucks. You made more than I did. What are you bitchin' about?"

In later years, I asked him, "In all the time that you worked for me in Atlanta, can you name one time that I fired you?"

Thunderbolt said, "Well, no. You always treated me good." He would tell me that to my face, but he wouldn't tell anybody else that. If it were somebody else, he would say, "Ole jacked me

around."

I continued. "The truth is, you used to walk out on me and other promoters all the time. You would quit every few months. You would quit without giving any notice. Nobody knew where you went. And yet, when you came back and said 'I want to go to work,' I never turned you away. The reason was, at one time, you were pretty damn good, and you made money for us. You made money for yourself. You bitched about it, but I recognized that you were a talent. The truth of the matter is, I was tired of your constant complaints, but I hired you back because you were black. If you had been white, I would have fired you in a heartbeat, and you would have stayed fired."

That was one of the times that I made an exception for someone who didn't show up. There's the exception, and it was a big one — Thunderbolt Patterson. I hired him because he was black. If he had been white, he never would have

had a job with me again. That's the truth.

But Thunderbolt never could quite understand that. He never will understand it. He thinks you're being prejudicial for anything you do. If you say hello, you're being prejudicial. If you say goodbye ... if you pay him. It doesn't matter what you do. It was a constant attitude of, "People are against me." I used to get so tired of listening to Thunderbolt's racial ranting, but I still never fired him. Long after he quit working for me, he used to tell stories about how we locked the doors and wouldn't let him in. That's a crock! If he had five bucks and bought a ticket, I would have let him in. I would let anybody in who showed up with five bucks in their hand.

Tony Atlas came down with that Thunderbolt Patterson attitude. One night, I booked Tony with Jim Raschke — who wrestled as Baron von Raschke. Jim was a former Big Eight Conference champion as a heavyweight at the University of Nebraska in 1962. He also made the Olympic

wrestling team in 1964, but hurt his elbow during a workout just before they left for the Olympic games in Tokyo. What did I do that night? I put Tony over Raschke. After the match, Tony came storming back to the dressing room, raising all kinds of hell. "I did all I could. Why did you put me out there with a guy like Raschke? He doesn't have a body and he looks like crap."

"You stupid moron," I chastised him. "You don't have a clue. If I had let Raschke go, he would have guzzled your ass. Instead, he was taking bumps for you and making you look like a superman."

That match was repeated for three more weeks. Tony won each time, and then he quit. He was lucky that Raschke didn't kill him.

I brought another black guy in to take Tony's place — Norvel Austin. Norvel was a nice kid. He was going to work with me all week. I told him right up front, "If I feel like you're getting

over, I'll keep you. But if you don't get over, then you're gone." I had never worked with the kid before, so I told him, "I'm in there just for you, so you beat the hell out of me. Do whatever you can. Show me what you've got. Move! Do something!"

He held back.

Pez Whatley would do the same thing. I liked Pez, but I used to cuss him out because he was always so nice. He had the perception, at least I think he did, that the white man was running things. His attitude always seemed to say, "I've gotta be nice to the white guy." If I was wrestling Pez, I would scream at him, "Eat me up! I'll stop you when I want to stop you! You can't do anything to me that I won't be able to withstand one way or another. If it's a submission hold, I'll get out of it. At the very least, I'll just tell you, 'Hey, slow down!' I can always do something to slow you down, but I can't make you go. You have to make yourself go." That's why Timmy Woods

was good, or Number Two was good. Wahoo was good. Paul Jones was good. Those guys would work hard. They would just go and go and go and go. Then you would have the little ebb and flow type of thing where you slow them down or stop them, and then they go again. A little bit later, you slow them down or stop them again, and then they start again, only this time they go a little bit more. Each time, their resistance builds just a little bit more than the time before, and pretty soon, they're making a full-blown comeback.

When I worked with Norvel Austin, though, he was just really laid-back. I would yell at him, "Come on, come on, come on!" But he just wouldn't do anything. After a week, I said, "Hey, I've got to let you go." He got mad at me and made some comments, and then I made a few back. He finally said, "You know, you think you're better than me." He hit me with the old, "You're prejudiced," angle and all that crap.

I looked at him and said, "I don't know about that,

but I do know one thing."

"Yeah, what's that?" he asked.

"I have a job ... and you don't."

That's the way I was with almost everybody. More than likely, if I didn't talk to somebody, I had already made up my mind that I was going to get rid of them because they were beyond talking to. I didn't have to like a guy to do business with him. If there was somebody I didn't like, it would be unlikely that I would fire him just for that reason. For that matter, I didn't like very many people anyway. I was never close to a lot of people. You could count the number of people that I liked on one hand — maybe on one finger. There were just a few guys that I really liked and trusted. If they were talented, and worked hard, I liked them. You have to understand that when I was booking, it was almost impossible to have anybody you could consider a friend, because there always came a time when you had to tell someone,

"Hey, it's time to go." More often than not, they took it personally and it led to hard feelings.

I liked Verne Gagne. I didn't know Lou Thesz well enough to have an opinion. Lou was just a guy we heard about. I only saw him on rare occasions. I always liked Stan Hansen, but we really didn't socialize together. Once in awhile, we went out and had a beer, but nothing too much more than that. I still talk to Stan and Verne now and then.

When I first met Stan Hansen, I didn't know him from anybody. He had just come out of New York. Gene and I watched the first match he had for us when we booked him in the Omni. I turned to Gene and said, "This guy is gonna make money for us," and he did make money for us. I saw that he had the ability to make money, even though I had been warned away from Stan by old man McMahon. That was Vince J. McMahon, the father of the Vince McMahon that everyone knows today. A lot of people call the son Vince

McMahon Jr., but he's actually Vince K. McMahon. For the purpose of making myself clear, though, whenever I refer to them, I'll use the Senior and Junior labels. McMahon Sr. was mad at Stan. He told me, "You're making a mistake by bringing Stan Hansen in." Verne got sideways with Stan, too. Stan walked out and went on a tour of Japan — and took the AWA world title belt with him.

There was a difference between Verne, McMahon, and me. I could handle Stan Hansen. Verne and McMahon couldn't. I remember talking to Verne after Stan walked out on him. "Verne, you should have called me. I could have had your belt back to you in no time." I really grew to like and respect Stan, but I didn't try to make money with him just because I liked him. I featured Stan because there were things we could do with him that worked. Stan could be as goofy and dumb as a stick, but he put everything into his matches. He was a hard-working guy. Stan also was clumsy. He couldn't see very well without his

glasses, so being able to judge where he was punching wasn't his strong suit. He punched me in the head when we were wrestling one night. It rocked me. He knew he had potatoed me, so he immediately began saying, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

"No, no. I'm okay," I assured him. A few seconds later, he nailed me again.

Later on, when I was lying on the mat, Stan was straddling me. He was holding my hair with one hand and punching me with the other. The problem was, my head was on the mat. If I was standing up when he punched me, all I had to do was step backwards and roll with the punch to get a little relief from it. But when your head is against the mat, there's no give. When Stan punched me, he really jarred my head. He said he was sorry. I told him once again, "I'm okay." Again, he said he was sorry — but he wanted to try it again. That was Stan.

There were several guys who were like

that. Buzz Sawyer was a likeable kid, not to mention a legitimate wrestler and a tough, little guy. Like Verne and Lou, I appreciated someone who had been through the mill, and who had actually wrestled amateur. He knew what it was like to work hard. I thought Buzz was a talented performer. I liked the fact that he was a wrestler who gave a believable performance in the ring. He could talk on the microphone, and occasionally, he had good ideas. I liked him, but by the same token, liking him didn't change my opinion when he messed up. I didn't know it until later, but Buzz was doing some things that I wasn't aware of. When he was in the ring, though, he was 100 percent. When he was on the microphone, he was 100 percent. Later on, when he came to work doped up, I fired him. I don't know how many times I fired him, but I fired him at least two or three times. After a period of time, I hired him right back.

As I've already mentioned, I liked Ronnie West, too, even though I fired him that time. I didn't take

any crap from anybody, no matter who it was. I liked Johnny Walker. That's why I went to his little get-together at the Hooters in Macon, Georgia, in the summer of 2001. I hadn't seen John for a long time. I think he was surprised that I showed up because the last I saw him prior to that event, we had been at odds, but I have a lot of respect for John. For the most part, John always did everything I asked him to do. I thought his gimmick as Mr. Wrestling #2 was great. He and I just went sideways because I told him that he had been in Georgia for too long and I wanted to do something that would rejuvenate him. He thought I was trying to screw him around.

Bobby Garrett was a good example of someone who listened to me. Bobby was a job guy on TV and he was a nice kid. Bobby also was at that get-together for Number Two. He told me, "I was always impressed with you. When I was in a match and I screwed up, you would cuss me out in the dressing room, right in front of everybody. You would say, 'You stupid

dumbass!' But do you know what? I appreciated it because you took the time to tell me what you thought I should be doing — what the business should be and how I should react to it. I learned a lot from you."

In my opinion, Jimmy Valiant was one of the nicest guys I ever met. He was so easy to get along with. "Okay, brother. Whatever you need, brother." He was just wonderful, outstanding. I first brought Jimmy into the Carolinas as a heel, but then I saw a tape of him doing a babyface interview. It was fantastic! He was so personable and came across so well on TV as a babyface. I didn't hesitate. He had only been there for a week or two, but I told him, "I want you out of the territory. Grow a beard, then I'll bring you back in about five weeks as a babyface." He also thought I was screwing him. I said, "No. I'm going to bring you back and make you a lot of money." I brought him back as the Boogie Woogie Man and we made money. I had him beat Ivan Koloff, who was over big, in a couple of minutes. The very next week,

Jimmy beat me. I believe the second time we went to Greensboro, he beat me in a couple of minutes, then we ran some guys into the ring and he knocked them all down. And he was so over! He had everything we needed to make him a superstar. That zany interview he did was wonderful. I just liked everything that Jimmy did. The Boogie Woogie Man was a fantastic gimmick. He was a gimmick that could draw a crowd and make money.

As far as people who I felt I really could trust, that list was a lot shorter. I could trust Bob Roop. I felt that way about Stan, too. Gene, for sure. I would stake my life on Gene.

It all boils down to this. I didn't look at people and think, I like them, or I don't like them. For the most part, I just looked at people and considered several factors. Will they work hard? Can they wrestle? Can they make money or not? If a guy wasn't talented, I got rid of him. If a guy was talented, but he was a pain in the ass, I might or

might not get rid of them. It all depended on the degree of ass pain that I had to put up with to keep them there. But whenever I fired someone, it was never personal. It was always business.

Chapter 29
The Road Warriors

If a guy had a personality, or a little bit of piss and vinegar about him, then there was a good chance that he was going to make a good wrestler. But if he just laid back and sat in the corner, and didn't say two words, in my opinion, he didn't have what it took to make it.

As a for-instance, the idea for the Road Warriors gimmick came about in 1982 after I saw the movie, The Road Warrior. As I watched it, an idea clicked in my mind. What a hell of an idea. We'll dress a couple of guys up to look like the biker characters in the movie and call them the Road Warriors. I was really going out on a limb, but I was looking for something a little bit different. I wasn't looking for wrestlers. I was looking for a team that looked impressive physically, and a little bit bizarre. I was going to create my own version

of Haystack Calhoun, Tex McKenzie, or Andre the Giant.

I called Eddie Sharkey, who trained a lot of wrestlers in Minnesota, and said, "Hey, Eddie. Can you come up with some guys that I could look at? I want somebody that's really well-built." He said he would put something together, so I flew up to Minneapolis and he introduced me to about fifteen guys. They were all tough kids who worked as bouncers for a beer joint called Gramma B's. As I went down the line, each one of them would greet me.

"It's really a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Anderson."

"Hello, Mr. Anderson. I used to watch you ..."

"Oh, gosh! I really think you're great."

As I stepped up in front of one guy, he said, "So, you're Ole Anderson? You don't look like too fuckin' much to me."

That was Mike Hegstrand, who later became known as Hawk.

When I got to the end of the line, I went back over to Eddie and said, "I know who I want. I want that guy right there." I pointed at Mike. I bought into Mike's cocky attitude right away. All the rest of them were blowing smoke up my ass.

Mike had a partner — Joe Laurinaitis. Years earlier, Joe Laurinaitis had been in Georgia with me, but he screwed up. I forget what he did. He swore or used the finger on TV, so I called Crockett, or whoever was booking the territory at the time, and fixed it up for him to work in Charlotte. He was there for a year or so, and then went home to Minneapolis. I don't know if Joe went back to bouncing immediately after he left Charlotte, but he must have eventually because that's what he was doing when I went to Minneapolis. We gave Joe the name "Animal" and put the two of them together as the Road

Warriors. Joe was really low-key, so Mike was the talker for the team. Of course, what I didn't know at the time was that they were both on the roids big time. Many years later, I told Mike, "That's what's wrong with you."

"Wadda ya mean?" he blustered.

"You're on those damn steroids."

He screamed, "What are you talkin' about?!"

"That's a good example of the problem," I explained. "They've altered your personality. You're all screwed up."

And he was. He had a natural smart-ass personality anyway, but the fact that he was on steroids made it even worse.

I asked Paul Ellering to be the manager of the Road Warriors. Paul couldn't work because he had just broken his leg or something, so I was going to get rid of him. Instead, I made him an

offer. "I'll tell you what. If you become the manager of these two guys I'm gonna bring in, we'll keep you on. I'm gonna call them the Road Warriors. I think they're gonna do well and I think we can make some money with 'em."

Paul thought it was a stupid idea. He didn't like the concept. Paul was never disagreeable about anything, but he had his doubts about this and he didn't think it would work. Strangely enough, Mike and Joe also thought it was a stupid idea. That was another good example of why I didn't waste a lot of time listening to other people. I looked at the idea as being different from anything we had done in the past. "Just give it a chance," I said, "and let's see how it goes. If it doesn't work, it doesn't work. We'll do something else."

Bill Watts made a valuable contribution by suggesting that we paint their faces. It was a great idea. The Road Warriors made lots of money rather quickly — even though they never really

became good workers. I had them go into the ring for 30 seconds, or a minute at the most, and then they were on their way back to the dressing room. That was it. They were made.

I heard the boys all grumble about the Road Warriors getting the big push, even though they were lousy workers. Here's the way I looked at it. I'm sure a lot of people felt the same way once they stopped to think about it. Andre the Giant wasn't a good worker, either. Happy Humphrey wasn't a good worker, or Haystack Calhoun. For that matter, Dusty Rhodes! Tex McKenzie was horrible. But they all had something that worked. As a promotion, we were trying to sell the total package. I don't mean the total package as in Lex Luger. I mean the total package in regards to some wrestling, some nonsense, some strongmen, some guys like Tommy Rich. We tried to present a show that had a little something for everybody. We're back to the old steak analogy. If you eat steak three times a day, every day, you're going to get sick of it.

Even Verne called to tell me that he was upset with me for starting the Road Warriors. He was upset primarily because they were buddies of Eddie Sharkey. Verne was mad at Sharkey because Eddie had supposedly walked into Verne's office one night and blown the hell out of it with a .357 Magnum. I don't know what transpired between those two, but that was Sharkey's creative way of letting Verne know that he was hot about something that Verne had done.

A lot of people have claimed credit for coming up with the idea for the Road Warriors. I just wanted to make money. That's all I wanted to do with the Road Warriors, so I don't really care who takes the credit for it, but if you ask Mike and Joe, they'll tell you that it was me.

When I brought the Road Warriors in, they did exactly what I asked them to do. Yes, most of their matches were the shits, but that's why I kept their matches very brief. Joe and Mike didn't know anything about working, and knowing how limited

they were, I had all their matches on TV go 30 seconds. Boom-boom-boom-boom-boom — and get out. I had all their matches on house shows go five minutes. I couldn't leave them in the ring for any great length of time because it would expose the fact that they weren't the big, tough, bad-asses that everybody thought they were. But the nature of their gimmick allowed them to get in and get out quickly. They weren't the type of people you could put out there for 30 minutes, but their gimmick looked so awesome that the people bought it.

It also was necessary for Joe and Mike to have someone credible to work with, someone who knew enough about ring psychology to know that once they got hit with the Road Warriors' big finisher, they were supposed to stay down. Many of the kids working today aren't that smart. They don't understand that concept. When their opponent hits them with a sledgehammer, they pop up. When their opponent runs over them with a cement truck, they jump right up. When their

opponent drops them off a 50-story building, they jump right up. Well, when the Road Warriors hit somebody, their opponents stayed down. They got pinned. They got beat. And it was impressive. It was short, and it was sweet, but the Road Warriors looked great.

I watched every one of their matches to be as certain as I could be that they weren't doing what Valentine had always warned me about: "Don't expose yourself." Everything they did, as limited as it was, looked like it could kill you — and it looked legitimate. The people were saying, "Jeez, he hit him with that huge arm. He must have killed the guy." When their victim didn't move, and sold it like he was dead, who was going to argue.

Did the fact that Joe and Mike couldn't wrestle bother me? Yes and no, but when you take into consideration that their match was only one out of six, or possibly seven, it wasn't a big deal if you handled it correctly. If we had six matches like their match, the entire show would have stunk. So

even though they couldn't wrestle, they did what I wanted them to do, which was create a new dimension in wrestling, so to speak, and have the people believe it.

In 1984, Joe and Mike went to work for Verne. They wanted to go back home to Minneapolis. Verne made them a deal and, to be blunt, stole them away. Admittedly, I didn't have a legal hold because I didn't have any paper on them, except for one contract I had Mike sign. It turned out to be a good move for everyone. Joe was pretty laid back, but Mike had reached the point where he would fight everybody, including Joe. They would go to a 7-Eleven and become impossible to deal with. They were still valuable, but they were becoming more trouble than they were worth. So when Verne began courting them, I didn't fight it. And they made a lot of money with Verne. But, once again, it was the booker. In this case, it was Verne who made it happen.

Chapter 30
“Be-eee there!”

In the ‘70s and early ‘80s, we were known as Georgia Championship Wrestling. We made two tapes in Atlanta for play in Atlanta and bicycled them to Rome, Augusta, Chattanooga, and whatever little towns we might have been running. We also made a third tape called The Best of Georgia Championship Wrestling, which played on Sunday afternoon. In addition, we made a separate tape for Macon, Georgia, because that was Fred Ward and Ralph Freed’s territory. We also made a tape in Columbus, Georgia, at four o’clock on Saturday afternoon to play that same night. Fred Ward bicycled one of those tapes to Albany, which also was their town. And at one time, we also made a tape in Savannah.

In those days, videotape was expensive, so the TV station taped over it two or three times. They

then threw it out because the quality of the tape had degraded to the point where it was no longer broadcast quality. We used 2-inch tape at first, and later on, we converted to 1-inch tape. Eventually, the stations all converted to 1-inch machines. We later converted to 3/4-inch tape, but 1-inch was generally the standard for the television stations.

In early 1980, it was Bill Watts who looked at the cities that had cable and the number of homes that received WTBS [TBS]. Also referred to as Channel 17 at the time, TBS published a booklet that showed where its cable penetration was and how many TV sets had access to the station. I used the booklet later on when I was booking, but Bill had enough foresight to pick up on the idea of using it back in 1980. He tumbled to the idea that Columbus, Ohio, could be run off the Atlanta TV, which was shown on cable in Columbus. Bill realized that a significant number of Columbus-area homes were capable of getting TBS, and the ratings numbers for TBS were really strong

there. Bill booked Georgia Championship Wrestling into Columbus, Ohio, in early 1980. In fact, I think I worked on one or two shows when Bill ran Columbus during the four months he was booking for Barnett.

Columbus was a huge success for us. In the early '80s, we either sold out the arena or came close to a sell-out every time we ran it, which was every three to four weeks. We would run the show on Sunday, so the fans would come in on Friday or Saturday night and stay at the Hyatt Regency, which is the hotel where we stayed. We wrestled in an auditorium that was connected to the hotel complex. The hotel was literally packed with wrestling fans who scheduled their entire weekend around the show. They would drive or fly in for the entire weekend, some of them coming in from 300 and more miles away.

When I returned to Georgia in May 1980, I really began to study the statistics that TBS published. The printouts listed every cable system

and the number of homes that were hooked up to the service. We immediately noticed that many small towns had over 20,000 subscribers on their local cable system, and they all received TBS. We began to ask ourselves, "Why aren't we going to those towns?" Our focus shifted to the towns that had at least 10,000 television sets, the towns that other promoters had overlooked. In January 1981, we began running all of Ohio, Michigan, and West Virginia. We made a tour out of it. We would book five or six towns and go up for an entire week. We would fly up after TV on Saturday for an evening show and work every day through Friday. We would fly back on Saturday and work in Georgia the following week. We would do a week in, go home for a week, and then back up for another week. That was our standard two-week schedule. We ran Canton, Charleston and Huntington, West Virginia. We went to Saginaw, Toledo, Grand Rapids, and Muskegon, Michigan. Those people there were big-time, TV wrestling fans.

Once WTBS was running in high gear, we cut out the Macon studio show. We concentrated on our Atlanta show and bicycled it into West Virginia, Ohio, and Michigan. Later on, we picked up Baltimore and Altoona. At first, the only exposure we had was from cable. We ran the towns solely off the TBS shows. We didn't have one local station, and yet, we were selling out and drawing a lot of money every time we ran.

We would do a $200,000 gross for the week — or more. Columbus, Ohio, was already doing more than $50,000 each night when we began going up north to Michigan, Ohio, and West Virginia. Cleveland was doing the same amount of money, perhaps a little more. We went to Canton and drew more than $25,000. Cincinnati and Akron were each bringing in between $20,000 and $30,000, give or take a few bucks. Saginaw, Michigan — $25,000. Charleston, West Virginia — $25,000 to $28,000. Huntington, West Virginia — $22,000 to $25,000. The towns were all doing well enough that the boys were making decent

money.

Since we weren't promoting in expensive places like New York, we were able to keep our ticket prices affordable. I believed that we had to keep our ticket prices comparable to the movie prices. Bill Watts, on the other hand, was the kind of guy who said, "Let's charge 75 bucks." I'm not knocking that because, to some degree, it worked for him. Bill was filling arenas that held 25,000 to 30,000 people, and more, and some of the fans were paying $100 a ticket. Who could argue with that? I never ran a town where 30,000 people came for anything, but Bill did, and he charged as much as $100 a ticket — and he was successful. He ran the New Orleans Superdome and packed the building. Bill would do that a few times a year, just like Eddie and Dusty did, but I was looking at going to those towns on a weekly basis. I just didn't feel there was any chance we could support a high-end ticket on a regular basis. I thought we could do it once in awhile, but I looked at it over the long run and asked myself,

"Do I want to draw $1 million over a year, or do I want to draw $250,000 on one show?" That was the basis for my position. We were able to go back and continue to draw money consistently.

Thanks to Bill Watt's vision of promoting through cable penetration, I began to notice so many towns that had high numbers of cable subscribers. We went to small towns like Athens, Ohio, and promoted in their high school. Who wants to go to a high school? Nobody!

But! We drew $13,000 at that little spot show. The gym was packed!

We went to a little town in West Virginia that was nestled in the hills. We drove in on twisting, winding roads. When we drove up, the town was deserted. There was nobody on the streets. I was seething. Sometimes, Ronnie West, Les Thatcher, or Ralph Freed would be out on the road, trying to pick up a town — any town — that wasn't too far away from a major city we were in. This town

wasn't too far away from Huntington, but when we drove into the town and saw a sign that said, "Population 2,000," you had to think that it was going to be a major waste of time.

The show was going to be held in an outdoor stadium. As we drove through the empty town to the stadium, I was thinking, My God! There won't be ten people there. When we pulled into the parking lot, we found 6,000 people waiting to see Georgia Championship Wrestling. The town was deserted — because everyone was at the show. Not only that, but everybody from 30 miles around was at that stadium to watch professional wrestling. The stadium was jammed to capacity. That was the way Columbus, Ohio, had been just a couple of years earlier. People made it an outing.

You name the town in Michigan — Saginaw, Grand Rapids, Muskegon. We were either selling out or doing very good business. Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, and Dayton were all great wrestling

towns in Ohio. I have no idea for the reason, but we struggled with Toledo. However, we could pick any week to go on tour and we would draw a couple hundred grand.

The original Sheik was a little upset about us going into Ohio. That part of the country was always considered to be his territory — but he had quit running it. Even so, I talked to the Sheik when we first began to promote up there. We didn't want to take anything away from him, so he was offered a deal and a partnership. He didn't want anything to do with it, so we ran without him.

It also was during that time that I called and asked Vince McMahon Sr. if he cared us going into Cleveland. Vince Sr. told me, "Cleveland is a dead town for wrestling. You can't make a dime in that town since Johnny Powers killed it."

"Then do you mind if we go?" I asked.

"Yeah, why not," he agreed. "Go ahead if you

want, but you'll never make a dime there because the town is dead."

I'm glad I didn't listen to Vince Sr. because regardless of what he thought about Cleveland, we sold it out — and we continued to sell it out in subsequent shows.

McMahon Sr. also told us to avoid Wheeling, West Virginia. Wheeling was one of the WWF's outpost towns, a town they ran infrequently. It was at the far edge of their territory. Vince Sr. didn't care if we ran there, but we didn't start running it until Vince Jr. began screwing with us. By that time, Vince had already taken some of our TV stations and some of our talent. I believe that was either just before or just after the old man died. When Vince began moving down that road, I decided to fight fire with fire. We went into Altoona and Pittsburgh, and in the summer of 1983, we went into Baltimore.

We ran many of the towns where the WWF

promoted and we drew big money. If we ran where they were still drawing money, they tried to beat us. Altoona, Pennsylvania was a good example. We both went into the same building, a small building called the Jaffa Mosque. They booked and ran a show the day before our show was scheduled — and we both sold out. When we went to Buffalo, which also was in McMahon's neck of the woods, we did very good business there, too. We were also selling out in Baltimore, which was exceptional considering the fact that all we had for TV there was a Public Broadcasting station. Since it was a Public Broadcasting station, we weren't allowed to air the interviews that advertised our matches. All we had was our show with a graphic at the close that said wrestling would be in Baltimore. That was it. You couldn't do interviews. You couldn't do anything on that PBS station.

There was a time in 1983 when we finally realized that it was to our advantage to have our program on a local television station, as well. We

wanted to insert our interviews that reflected each specific town, as opposed to the Channel 17 commercial, which simply said that Georgia Championship Wrestling was on tour. "Tonight, Georgia Championship Wrestling will be at the Meadowlands. Tomorrow night, they'll be somewhere else." That was the only mention we could make of our arena shows. But with that little bit of advertising from TBS, where all we did was tell the people where we were going to be on a specific date, it was nothing short of amazing that we were selling out. We went to places like Huntington and talked to the local stations. Actually, we were only bicycling in what they had already seen on cable. Ted Turner had a stipulation that the wrestling show had to air on TBS first. After that, we could send the tapes wherever we could find a local TV station. When we went to the Meadowlands in New Jersey, it was promoted almost entirely off of Channel 17.

My point is, we were selling out or almost selling out, and doing that big business with our show on

nothing more than cable television. As such, the tapes weren't geared to promote specific towns. The people bought tickets because they enjoyed our wrestling.

As our announcer, Freddie Miller, used to say at the end of each commercial — "BE-EEE THERE!"

Chapter 31
Power Play

It wasn't uncommon for promoters to take money out of the box office every night to cover incidental expenses, or to pay off politicians and the sports commissioners — to grease the wheels, so to speak. At least, that was the reason they gave for dipping into the till. When the towns were doing good business, the amount of money being taken ran into the thousands. We were running as many as 20 towns in Georgia every week, all of which were a potential source of unreported income. As an example, a good house in Rome, Georgia, was $3,000, but over a period of a year, the town probably averaged $2,000 a week. In a small town of that size, a promoter could knock down $300 to $500 a week off the top.

When we were running Columbus, Ohio, where the gate was often close to $50,000 every three

weeks, Jim Barnett had me, and/or Ronnie West, and/or Bobby Simmons, and/or Charlie Smith, bring $3,000 or more in cash back to the Atlanta office. In some small towns, Barnett would tell Charlie Smith, "Charlie, we have to pay some politicians off, so we need to get $500 out of the house." If the house was $2,200, the report would show something like $1,700 — while Charlie delivered the other $500 to the office. Ronnie West would bring money from Statesboro. "Ronnie, when you run Statesboro tonight ..." Doug Smith was working for Barnett in Marietta. Charlie Harben was handling Rome and Augusta. The amount of cold, hard cash being delivered to the Atlanta office was huge — and the funny thing about it was, almost everybody was taking money to Barnett without even realizing that everybody else was — because nobody was talking to anybody else.

I questioned Charlie Harben about the Augusta money and a few other deals that were taking place. Charlie was an old-timer who was loyal to

Barnett for one reason. Barnett paid him. He didn't care for Barnett, but he knew where his money was coming from. Augusta, which was usually a sellout, ran anywhere from $10,000 to $12,000 on a weekly basis. If you multiply the house times 50, that's a cool $500,000-plus for the year — but for some reason, that money didn't go directly to Atlanta. Charlie used to bring the money back from Augusta, until one day when he suddenly began depositing it into a bank account right there in Augusta — an account set up specifically for that money. I asked Charlie, "Why are you depositing the money in an Augusta bank? That money should go directly to the Atlanta office."

"Well, that's just to avoid getting hit over the head and robbed," Charlie explained.

I called Barnett and asked him about the situation. "Why doesn't Charlie just get a cashier's check and bring it back."

"Oh, Ole. You don't understand how that works. We have to bank there because one of the board members of the bank is Carl Sanders, the former Governor of Georgia. If we didn't use his bank for the Augusta proceeds, he'd be all upset."

The account was used to pay the wrestlers, but it also was used to pay somebody else. In other words, not all of the money was getting to the stockholders of Georgia Championship Wrestling.

What I do know is that a percentage of the money from many of the shows was being delivered directly to Barnett. I made many of those deliveries myself. But the proceeds from Augusta? Ching-ching!

There may actually have been politicians to pay off, but not on a scale in respect to the amount of money that was being collected. For the most part, the commissioners were only interested in measuring the height of the ring, making sure that you had the proper wrestling attire, and making

certain that their cockamamy doctor had given you some kind of a physical. When we went up to Michigan, as a for-instance, and I think it was either Saginaw or Grand Rapids, the commission was paid a few bucks at each show. The big thing to the commissioners, though, was that they got to wear a badge and get in free, and they were allowed to go into the dressing room area with the wrestlers. I guess they thought it made them look like big shots to the people in the town who came to watch the matches. That gave them their little moment of celebrity because they were back there with the "rasslers" in the rasslers' dressing room.

In one of those towns, the commission representative told me that we had to adjust the height of the ring because it was too low. "What does that have to do with anything?" I asked.

"Well, this is not a regulation-size ring," he explained. "It has to be ..." whatever the height was. In my opinion, he was just looking for a little bit of a payoff. I asked him for his name, address

and phone number. "What do you want that for?" he asked.

I summed it up for him. "I'm going out to the ring to make the announcement that Commissioner ... what was that name again?" Before he could say anything, I continued. "Oh, yes. I want to tell them that Commissioner Joe Smith ordered us to cancel the show because the ring is too low and everyone has to get their money back and go home." We always did good business in Michigan. I don't know how many people were there that night, but it was somewhere in the range of 5,000 to 6,000. I drove my point home by explaining the consequences of such an action. "If you're still alive when I finish making the announcement, I'll be really surprised."

Suddenly, the ring met the standards of the Commission. He relented. "Okay, you can have the show, but the next time ..." I just walked away.

We would have a fire marshal try to wield his

authority every now and then. In some cases, like in Atlanta, I just paid the guy. One night, the fire marshal said, "You have too many people in the building."

I looked around. "What are you talking about? There's empty seats all over the building!" And there was.

He wasn't going to take no for an answer. "I'm telling you. You have too many people."

I directed his attention to a section of bleachers. "Look over there. You have a whole section of empty seats."

Once again, he said, "You've got too many people."

I handed him a hundred bucks and he said, "Okay."

In regards to the Commission coming down with any legitimate complaint, all it really boiled down

to was that we had to pay their fee. Most of the time, it was five to 10 percent of the gate. When we settled up with the building, a representative from the Commission was always on hand, ready to collect their percentage. That's why Vince McMahon fought the Commission and finally admitted that wrestling was a show. He didn't want pro wrestling listed in the sports category. He wanted it to be regulated by an entertainment commission — the same people who regulated companies like Walt Disney World.

Prior to that, we argued other points — the commission didn't do anything for the wrestlers, there were no health benefits, there was no pension fund. They did absolutely nothing! And yet, we had to be licensed. We paid the commission fifteen to 20 bucks for a license, but they didn't do anything for us. What was the point of it? It was just a way to extort money out of us, or to allow the commission representatives to walk around the building and act like they were big shots.

By 1982, Georgia Championship Wrestling was in big trouble. Money was continually being siphoned out of the houses for incidental expenses. If we did a $51,000 house in Columbus, Ohio, only $46,000 showed up in the books. If we did $22,000 in Atlanta, only $19,000 would show up on the books. Nobody wanted to ask Barnett for an accounting of the money because Barnett was the power. He had been around the business since 1948 and he had a lot of connections.

Everyone was under the impression that Barnett was a multi-millionaire. The truth is, Barnett wasn't a multi-millionaire. He wasn't even a one-millionaire. Eddie Graham told me that he loaned $100,000 to Barnett to help finance the Australia territory because they were having a tough time making any money. The promotion failed a few months later, so Barnett packed his bags and returned to the States. At that point, Eddie asked Barnett for whatever was left of his $100,000. Eddie laughed and said, "Wouldn't you know it? Barnett told me he had spent every

penny."

I don't know if this is true, but according to Eddie, when Barnett bought Georgia Championship Wrestling, he didn't put one dime down. Barnett was said to have bought it all on the promise to pay Lester Welch a certain amount of money for Lester's points in the company, but he was going to pay it on installments — which I assume came directly from the receipts of Georgia Championship Wrestling. Someone else told me that Barnett paid Lester $50,000 up front. Years later, after I took control of the company from Barnett, we were looking through the books. I found an entry indicating a tractor was part of the deal. I have no idea what that was all about.

Here's the story about the Georgia promotion as it was told to me by Eddie Graham. At one time, the promotion was booked by a wrestler named Ray Gunkel, but it was owned by three people — Paul Jones [the old-time wrestler], Ray Gunkel, and Lester Welch. The company was called ABC

Booking. In 1972, Ray died after a match in Savannah, Georgia. When Ray's business partners tried to push Ray's wife, Ann Gunkel, out of the company, she formed her own promotion, the All-South Wrestling Alliance.

Some time after Barnett bought into the Georgia promotion that was owned by Welch and Jones, Ann Gunkel called Barnett and threatened to sue him. Barnett was scared that Ann would follow through with her threat and sue him personally. According to Eddie, Barnett had her sign an agreement that she wouldn't sue him personally in exchange for more than $200,000. Ann received those payments over a period of years. Later, and I'm not sure of the time frame, probably near or at the end of receiving those payments, Ann later sued Georgia Championship Wrestling, and received another $200,000 to $250,000. I know this for a fact because I made the last $5,000 monthly payment to Ann at the beginning of 1983.

Fred Ward told me that Barnett would ask the partners for money on occasion. This is the story as Fred told it to me. Barnett would let things run their course for a year or so, and then he would tell his partners, Fred Ward and Paul Jones, "Oh, my goodness. We're in financial trouble. We all need to ante in $50,000 apiece." Barnett was referring to Fred Ward, Paul Jones and himself. Fred would kick in his $50,000. Paul Jones would add his $50,000. Barnett would say he kicked in his $50,000, but according to Fred, he and Paul Jones always wondered if Barnett actually kicked anything in. Regardless, Barnett now had $100,000 of capital to play around with. Two months later, as the company made a few bucks, Georgia Championship Wrestling would repay $50,000 to Fred Ward, $50,000 to Paul Jones — and presumably, $50,000 to Jim Barnett.

The question Fred had was — did Barnett ever put any money into the pot?

I can't stress it enough when I say that we —

Ronnie West, Charlie Smith, Bobby Simmons, Charlie Harben, myself, and who knows who else — were delivering a lot of money to Barnett from the towns. I can't swear to what that money was being used for. Supposedly, it was used being used to payoff politicians, commissioners, or whoever. What I do wonder is if it ever made its way into the corporate accounts, or if the stockholders ever received any part of that money. I do know that people used to ask me, years later, why Barnett was given such free reign over the corporation cash. The answer is simple. Nobody was about to ask Barnett because they all saw him as a multi-millionaire and the boss. Nobody had the guts to even question him about it. He was able to run the company any way he wanted to run it. In addition, neither the NWA nor Georgia Championship Wrestling had any system of check and balance. Fred once told me, "Barnett has created one of the best gimmicks ever in the wrestling business." The shareholders were a loose-knit group of former wrestlers — Jack Brisco, Bill Watts, Tim Woods, Jim Oates, Paul

Jones, Ralph Freed, Gene Anderson — who let Barnett run the business. That being the case, nobody questioned Barnett about the financial transactions of the company.

Other problems began to crop up during this time. Vince was beginning to get upset about us promoting in his back yard. I was concerned that Barnett was pushing me to expand into Vince's territory, and then he would lay the blame on my shoulders when Vince or anyone else would call. He passed the buck onto me a few times, saying things like, "Well, you know how difficult Ole can be." I knew that when it finally got to the point where the promoters were really upset with us, and Barnett couldn't use me as the excuse for why he was running those towns, he was simply going to say, "Ole, I just have to let you go." And, of course, at that point, I wouldn't be able to get work with anybody else because I had been running what amounted to opposition. And according to Barnett, it would have been all my idea. "Oh, you know how Ole is when he gets his

mind made up. I'll try to talk to him."

In the last week of December 1982, Ralph Freed and I went over to Barnett's apartment. I did all the talking, while Ralph acted like he didn't know what was going on. I laid it out to Barnett in simple terms.

"You owe me twenty grand. I want it. The company owes a lot of money, too, because you're running the company into the toilet."

We had serious debt. The company owed a lot of money to television stations, newspapers, and radio stations. I said, "There's gonna be a change. We're going to call a stockholder meeting and there will be a vote. I'm going to be elected chairman and president of Georgia Championship Wrestling and I'm gonna run the company. You can tell people anything you want to tell them because I'm not gonna tell anybody other than the stockholders. You can tell everybody you're the president of Georgia Championship

Wrestling. You can tell them you're the chief executive officer. Tell them whatever you want. I don't care. The only thing you won't able to do is write a check or have free access to any money. You've got millions of dollars, so you can live on those millions of dollars. Right now, we need every single dollar we can lay our hands on in order for Georgia Championship Wrestling to survive."

That was exactly how it all went down. Barnett didn't like it, of course. I don't know if my final statement had anything to do with his decision, but it may have played a small part. "You don't have to accept those terms, but if you don't, I'm going to dump you over your balcony railing." Of course, at the time, I was kidding. But now, years later, I wonder why I didn't.

When the afternoon of the meeting rolled around, the stockholders were all aware of the situation. I had a lot of conversation with Jack Brisco, Jerry Brisco, Ralph, Fred, and Gene prior to the

meeting. The only stockholder who didn't know about it ahead of time was Jim Oates, Barnett's pookie pal. I told them that we were in trouble financially and that Barnett was bleeding the company dry. We had a stockholder meeting and Barnett made the announcement. "Ole will be running the corporation and he'll be the president."

Two days later, our new arrangement was finalized. Within the week, Barnett called, wanting to meet me for lunch. As we ate, he told me that at the very least, he wanted to continue drawing his salary. Up to that time, he had been getting what he referred to as a "pittance" of a salary — $1,500 a week. I thought that was interesting. Barnett was a multi-millionaire, but he still felt it was important to take a "little something" from Georgia Championship Wrestling. His reasoning was, "How will it look if I'm not drawing a salary? It looks funny if the president of Georgia Championship Wrestling doesn't make at least $1,500 a week."

I laid it on the line. "I'm not going to pay you because we need that money to pay our bills." He never got one penny after that. A few days later, he came back and said he would be willing to settle for $500 a week. I said, "Jim! You have millions of dollars. What's five hundred bucks to you?"

Once I cut Barnett off from the expense fund, the money suddenly began to accumulate and I paid off the company debts in less than six months.

It must have been at that point that Jim decided to work a deal with Vince McMahon Jr. to see if he could get hired. At the time, I still didn't realize that all the stories about him being a multi-millionaire were fabrications. I believed them. I think Ralph believed them. Jack, Jerry, and everybody else believed him. The only person who knew the stories weren't true was Verne Gagne. Years later, when I talked to Verne, I mentioned something about Barnett being a millionaire.

Verne looked at me in amazement. "So he's still telling that story?"

Verne started in Chicago with Barnett and Fred Kohler back in the late '40s. He and Barnett were very influential in running a wrestling program for the Dumont network, until Dumont went out of business in 1956. At that point, the promoters all went their separate ways and formed their own promotions. Barnett promoted in Indianapolis until the mid-'60s, when Dick the Bruiser threatened him and chased him out of the territory. The way I heard it is that Bruiser's mother was very influential in Indiana politics, so one day, Bruiser told Barnett, "You're out. I'm in." Bruiser thought it was funny that I had taken over from Jim Barnett in 1983. Bruiser used to say, "Dammit, kid. We're the only two guys that screwed Barnett," and then he would laugh out loud. I don't think his statement was altogether accurate, but we'll leave it at that. Barnett moved his operation to Detroit before going to Australia in the early '60s.

Barnett told us his father was an oil multi-millionaire from Oklahoma City, who was said to own blocks of land in Kansas City and Tulsa. To hear Barnett tell it, his father owned more land in Oklahoma than there was land. However, the story I heard from another source was that his father worked as a haberdasher in a clothing store.

Barnett lived a high lifestyle. He had an apartment in downtown Atlanta. He had a chauffeur, a black kid who wore a uniform and drove him around in a Rolls Royce. He had a cook and a maid. He was on several boards in Atlanta — the hospital board, the arts council. He was well connected — so well connected that you can see him standing on the stage in the picture that was taken at the swearing-in ceremony at Jimmy Carter's inauguration.

And yet, at the same time, I was loaning Barnett as much as $20,000 at a stroke. I still have a note for the $20,000 that he owes me. Most of the time, the loans he asked me for were small amounts —

$2,000, $5,000 — but adding them all together, it amounted to a lot of money. I found out later that he also was borrowing money from other people. And even though he was constantly borrowing money from other people, I still thought he was a multi-millionaire. Eventually, each time I loaned him money, I would ask, "Why do you need this when you've got millions?"

He always had the same answer. "Ole, cash is hard to come by because everything is all tied up in stocks and bonds. I just need $10,000 in cash to give to some of the politicians and I know you've got it. We need to spread it around to help our business."

I couldn't argue with that, so I would give him the money. How could I refuse to give him the money? He was paying me a salary of $2,400 a week, main-event money, and eventually paid me 5 percent of Michigan, 3 percent of Atlanta, and 5 percent of Augusta. No one else ever questioned it, either. Everybody was of the opinion that

Barnett was a multimillionaire. As such, they felt that he was untouchable. He ran the company the way he wanted to run it, and nobody questioned it to any great degree. Ralph and Fred were the only people who might have had a reason to question it, but they were dependent on the book in Atlanta to help their towns draw. In addition to that, Barnett was smart enough to give the stockholders rather decent dividends from time to time, when excess money was available.

As I mentioned earlier, the last time he borrowed money from me, he asked for $20,000. It was supposed to be for a city councilman who had strong political connections in Atlanta. I gave Barnett a box that contained $20,000 in cash. As I said earlier, he never paid it back. Years later, I sued him for it. I showed my attorneys the note that Barnett had written out and signed. "Is this note worth anything?"

My attorney said, "Yeah. He owes you $20,000."

I perked right up. "Great! How can we collect it?"

He went right on the offensive. "We'll file a lawsuit immediately. He'll have thirty days to answer the suit."

I wasn't leaving anything to chance. I asked him, "What will we do if he doesn't answer it?"

"Then we'll get a judgment," he said. "If we have to, we'll go to his apartment, or wherever he has anything of value, and if we have to, we'll take the paintings off the walls."

I decided that it was worth pursuing, so I told him, "Fine. Go ahead and get things rolling."

That's what they did. When 30 days had passed, I called my attorney and asked him if he had received an answer from Barnett or his attorneys. "He hasn't addressed the lawsuit. We gave him a fifteen-day extension."

I thought I was hearing things. "Why would you give him an extension?"

He gave me the typical pass-the-buck, lawyer double-talk. "Well, it's a courtesy. That's the common practice." Bear in mind, just 30 days before that, he told me we would go for a judgment if we didn't get a response. Fifteen days later, Barnett's attorney responded to the initial lawsuit, which put us in a legal mode. He set it up so we could now go on for the next three thousand years.

The next step was to call Barnett in and take his deposition. I still have a copy of the deposition. Barnett was asked the question, "Were you ever a millionaire?"

His response? "Oh, no. I was never a millionaire."

The person who was really steamed over that admission was Ralph Freed. Once we began running in the Omni, that was the only show that

Barnett would show up for. He would be there for two hours prior to the start of the show. That was the time when the stooges all came out of the woodwork. Dusty Rhodes would try to work his wonders on Barnett. Dick Slater would do what he could. Anybody else who wanted to be a stooge, which of course, they all were, had their shot during that time. They would have their private audience with Barnett, drinking their little glasses of Courvoisier. Forty-five minutes before showtime, I usually had all I could take of Jim Barnett, so I would ask Ralph to drive him home. Years later, when Ralph and I came to the conclusion that Barnett wasn't a multimillionaire, Ralph said, "Dammit! I was driving that bastard around and he didn't even have any money." We were all fooled.

Barnett would do clever things. He would be on the phone in his office with the door closed. Sometime during the day, he would get up and go out, leaving his office unguarded and unlocked. Doug Smith would walk in, and then he

would call out, "Hey, Ole! Come look at this." Barnett had "accidentally" left a note on his notepad. Doug picked up the pad of paper and read the words out loud. Barnett had written, "Sell 20,000 shares of AT&T at $4.75 per share." He had notes strewn around his office that referred to huge transactions that amounted to hundreds of thousands of dollars. In my opinion, it was all bogus. He created fictitious notes up and casually left them on his desk for people to find.

No, Jim Barnett was never a millionaire — but he was riding in a chauffeured Rolls Royce, had a maid, and an apartment in Atlanta's high-rent district — all courtesy of Georgia Championship Wrestling.

Chapter 32
McMahon Makes His Move

By late 1983, we were playing a new ball game. That was when the crap really started to hit the fan. It was a ball-busting time for me. I was facing opposition from people who should have been helping me build our business — Jim Barnett, Jack and Jerry Brisco, and Paul Jones' wife. I even had to fight the management at the TV station. They assigned a girl to us to review our television show plans before we began taping. She was a heavy-set, repulsive bitch. We called her Landrover. We never took her suggestions, but I had to meet with her once a week, just to placate her. On her first week, she asked to review our script. "Well, as soon as we write one, I'll personally hand you a copy," I

assured her.

We never had a script, so she never got one, so she called and said, "I want to know what you're gonna do on TV."

I said, "I can give you a list of the wrestlers who are scheduled to appear on TV. I can't guarantee that they'll all be there because if somebody gets hurt the week before, they might not make the TV. But other than giving you a list of who's supposed to be here, and what the match-ups are, I don't have anything else to give you."

She didn't let me off that easily. "Come on. You have to give me an outline of what you're planning to do on TV."

"Well, the first match is gonna have a ten-minute time limit. We might not have a winner in that time. If it goes less than ten minutes, then we'll have to come up with something else to fill in. I don't have any idea what that's gonna be, but I

won’t worry about it until it happens." She went ballistic.

I did my best to make her believe that the show and matches were spontaneous. Once in awhile, she would take me aside when the show was over and tell me what she considered to be unacceptable. It was always something very important. For instance, she might say, "The guy on the second match was wearing wrestling trunks that were too tight. They revealed too much of his private parts."

Prior to that, there were no restrictions on anything other than the fact that they didn’t want any blood. That was the first big thing. Even so, we did have blood once in awhile, and that usually got me a meeting with Ted Turner.

We really were in a lot of turmoil at that point because that’s when Vince began raiding our televisions. If I remember correctly, the first one was Cincinnati.

When the old Dumont network went out of business, in the mid-50s, that whole group of wrestlers — Roy Shire, Verne, Bob Geigel — scattered to the four corners of the nation and made their own deals with the local TV stations and they became promoters. I never asked any of them specifically if the studios paid the promoters anything for their tapes, but I did hear about it happening in the early days of studio wrestling. Verne told me they didn't get very much — $50 to $100, maybe $200. The promoters weren't too concerned about getting paid for their TV show because they all looked at it as nothing more than a vehicle to promote their house shows. Verne also told me that in the '60s, he could have bought Channel 17, the studio where he filmed his TV show. What is the station worth today? I don't have any idea, but Verne admitted that he screwed up by not taking the deal.

By the time I got into the wrestling promotion end of the business, which was 1976, I didn't know of anybody getting paid for their TV show. We

usually had a barter arrangement with the station. They would give us a certain number of minutes of commercial time. Let's say there was fifteen minutes of commercial time in an hour. The station would give us five minutes so we could air our promos for the towns. They would take the balance of the ten minutes and sell advertising. Of course, later on, we ended up paying them up front to air our show. That's where Vince really put the screws to us in 1984.

We landed a big TV deal in Cleveland. Barnett flew in and I picked him up at the airport. We were going to call on the station together. Jim made a deal for $500 a week, even though we weren't even going to run the town for another three months. I stepped in and told the station manager, "We can't afford to do that." This was the winter of 1982 and I knew I was getting ready to kick Barnett out. I told the manager, "Here's the best we can do. We'll give you $500 every time we run a show at the local arena."

He didn't hesitate. He took the deal.

When we left, Barnett said, "Oh, my goodness. You were so good."

We eventually did that with all our TV shows. If we were paying $500, we tried to do it on every show, but it was based on the house show. We would tell the station manager, "Every time we run a house show, we'll pay you X number of dollars." In addition to that, we would guarantee to run a show every two weeks, every three weeks, or whatever the agreement was. Sometimes, we would agree to buy X number of dollars worth of advertising for every house show. For instance, in Columbus, Ohio, we spent $1,500 with their promotional department for each house show, and we ran a house show every three or four weeks. That was their payment for putting our TV on the air.

The attitude of the TV station toward wrestling depended on the station manager, or on whoever

was running the show. A lot of stations treated us with an awful lot of contempt. In other places, they were happy to have us because they realized they could get big rating numbers with our show. Sending a tape to a TV station was one thing. Taping a live TV show at the studio was another ball game altogether. In order to have a live TV program, you had to have someone at the station who really believed they could make money and get big numbers with wrestling. They also had to be willing to overlook some of the strange things that happened, because no matter how hard I tried to control it, one of the boys would always do something to demonstrate how much of a moron he could be.

Outside of Georgia, most of our deals were set up along the lines of Columbus, Ohio, where we paid promotional money to the station only when we ran a house show. Those deals were where the trouble began. Vince's people went to Cincinnati and offered them much more than we were paying. On one particular station, I was told that Vince's

people offered them $2,000 a week. We were only paying $1,500, and that was only when we ran a show, which might be once every three weeks. Do the math. Vince's $2,000 a week is $8,000 a month — versus our $1,500 a month.

Vince's people lied more than Bill Clinton ever did. They called the Cincinnati station and said something like, "We're the WWWWWWWWWF wrestling organization out of New York." The station manager perked up when he heard them mention the words New York. "We have a wrestling program that's much more exciting than Georgia Championship Wrestling. You probably already know about it, but if you don't, we thought we'd let you know that Georgia Championship Wrestling will no longer be booking their shows in the Riverfront Coliseum. They've lost their lease on the building. Knowing how important wrestling is to your station, and so you don't have to miss a week, we'd like to offer to put our show on your station. We can have our representative deliver it

to you tomorrow so you can preview it. If it's acceptable, we'd like to substitute for Georgia Championship Wrestling and pay you $2,000 a week."

The people at the station didn't even check! They took the statement at face value. Even if they had checked, they would have said, "Two grand is better than no grand. Let's go with the WWF." The WWF was drawing huge numbers then, so they accepted their show.

In my opinion, the WWF made deals they never intended to fulfill. They would come in later and say, "Gee whiz. We think $2,000 is a little more than we can afford. We can't justify the cost." They then would work up another deal. Meanwhile, we were already out of the picture.

We didn't have contracts with the stations. Sometimes we had a handshake deal, but for the most part, it was only to provide them with

a television show. There was nothing binding. The station could do whatever they wanted to do. Up to that point, that arrangement worked for us well because we could do whatever we wanted to do, too. As long as we provided a TV show, they promised to put it on the air. Let's face it. We didn't have any contracts, so what were we going to do? Go after the TV station?

"We had a verbal agreement and you gave our time to Vince."

"That's right."

Now what do you do?

Then Vince's people went to the arenas and said, "I don't know if you've heard yet, but Georgia Championship Wrestling just lost its TV contract at Channel 11. Call the station and verify it." When they called the station, the station personnel would say, "Yeah, we have the WWF show now." The WWF people then would say, "We know you have

shows booked in the upcoming months." That was true. We booked as much as a year ahead. "We'll be more than willing to take over those dates. Whatever deal you have with Georgia Championship Wrestling, we'll do better."

I was on the phone that same afternoon with Verne, telling him this very story. We were having one of our phone meetings where we were trying to decide how we were going to fight Vince McMahon. As I was telling Verne about the tactics that Vince used, Verne was laughing and poo-pooing it. He just couldn't believe it. "That's impossible," he chuckled. "They can't do that."

Two hours later, Verne got a phone call from the person he had handling San Francisco. The guy said, "Verne, we just lost the TV station." Vince's people had stuck it to Verne, too. They took the Cow Palace right out from under him, and then they took his TV, or vice versa. Verne called me back and said, "We just lost our TV in San Francisco."

I had voiced my feelings on the situation at the National Wrestling Alliance promoters' meeting in August 1983. Vince McMahon's father was a member of the NWA, so he was there. I stood up in the middle of the meeting and said, "What a bunch of bullshit this meeting is! Here's Vince McMahon, a member of the NWA. While he's sitting here in this meeting with us, his bastard son is out there stealing our TV stations."

Old man McMahon approached me later that day and said, "You know, you and my boy are very much alike." I was stunned! At first, I didn't know what to think. Then I wanted to puke. Then I wanted to punch him. I remember thinking, Does he mean I'm a piece of shit like his son? He wanted me to meet upstairs with Vinnie to discuss things, but I wouldn't do it. I didn't want any part of it. I said, "You guys have been out there stealing our televisions, and stealing our buildings. I don't have anything to talk to him about." At the end of several days of meetings, Vince McMahon Sr. stood up and announced that

the WWWF was withdrawing from the NWA.

Other things began to happen almost immediately. I don't have proof that Vince had anything to do with it, but eight to ten squad cars pulled up at the TBS TV station in Atlanta one Saturday morning to pick up Jake the Snake. They had been tipped off that he had drugs with him. He was on enough crap that it wouldn't have surprised me if they did find something, but I asked them, "Where did you get the information?"

They wouldn't tell me. All they said was, "We had a reliable source who told us he was dealing in drugs."

They took Jake to jail, searched all his bags, and didn't find anything but prescription drugs. They were legal prescriptions, but they still took him down to the station. I told the police, "Your reliable information wasn't very reliable." I had to send somebody down to get Jake out so he could make it to the TV, but by the time they got back to

the studio, it was too late.

They arrested Buzz Sawyer at the airport, turned all of his bags inside out, and threw them all over the place. That happened several times. The police would be waiting for us when we got off the plane — searching bags, making guys take their clothes off. We had our cars trashed, windows smashed, and tires flattened.

Things like that began to happen on a frequent basis. We had shows cancelled. We would call the building manager. "How are the ticket sales going?"

"We stopped selling them."

"What do you mean you stopped selling them?"

"We got a call from your office last week. They said you were canceling the show."

At other times, someone would call the building manager and say, "Our TV didn't air this past

Saturday," or, "The guys got into a car wreck. We're gonna have to cancel the show." When we get to the building, the morons tell us, "You called us yesterday to cancel the show. We gave everybody's money back." Things like that happened over and over and over.

There were all kinds of weird things going on. Was Vince behind any of it? I don't have any proof that he was. Do I think he was? Sure. Nothing like that ever happened until he got involved, but I don't have any proof and probably never will. And now ... who cares.

Chapter 33
Dope — and Dopes

I was really going through a bad time. It was just a ball-busting time for me. I had so much to deal with. As far as the day-to-day operation of the business goes, things were really no different from what I had always done, but the problems had been escalated by Vince. I had to worry about hanging onto the TVs, finding new TVs, keeping the towns, looking at new towns, working the towns. The problems affected my attitude and outlook, which in turn, affected the business.

At the same time, I was having trouble with several of the guys, and the main problem was drugs. I think just about everybody was on some kind of a drug. They were either snorting cocaine, smoking dope, or popping pills. For a long time, I wasn't smart to that fact. I had never touched a joint. I wouldn't know cocaine if I saw it on a

table in front of me. I had never used anything in my life — nothing. That was one big difference between me and everybody else. I didn't do any of that stuff. If someone would take me out for dinner, I might have one drink — not two drinks — one drink. When we were finished, I would say, "Okay, who's taking me home?" I wasn't taking any chances. That being the case, I didn't realize that drug usage among the boys was so prevalent. I was ignorant when it came to drugs. I just had no idea. I didn't think in those terms.

The first time I saw wrestlers using drugs, they were smoking marijuana. By the '80s, marijuana was no longer the choice. It was cocaine.

I'm so thankful that Bob Roop was working for me. Bob was great. He kept me tuned into what was going on. I first met Bob in 1971 when I was wrestling in Florida. When he went to work for me in 1983, he came out of Bill Watts' territory. Bob was great. To my knowledge, while he was working for me, he never touched the

stuff, but because of his background, he was invaluable to me. Bob wasn't stooging to me, but drug usage by the boys was a real problem. He had been around all that stuff and could alert me to possible problems that might crop up. He opened my eyes to what everyone was doing. "That guy is on something. Look at his eyes. You can see it." I wouldn't have known that if Bob hadn't told me. It explained the erratic behavior that I had been seeing in some of the wrestlers. It was something that I had to stop or control to whatever extent was possible. Being ignorant about what was going on really wasn't an excuse, so Bob would explain and tell me what to look for. I would go to the person in question and say, "Hey, I know you're on dope." He would look surprised and say, "Who told you?" I didn't say, "Bob Roop just told me." I would say, "Nobody had to tell me. I can look at your eyes and tell. I would have to be blind to not notice it. I noticed it, so now you have to do something about it." That was the first that I was really aware of the extent of drug usage in the rank and file. With some of the guys, it was pretty

evident that they were on one thing or another, but it was already too late. There was no turning back. It was all but over.

I first became aware of the problem the guys had with drugs when I went to the Carolinas in 1981. When the guys would joke about drugs, I thought they were just joking, but drug use among the boys was so widespread. One night, one of the boys looked at me and said, "Jeez, I have a tough decision to make."

"What's that?" I asked.

"Well, I don't know whether I should spend my money on coke or food this week."

We all laughed, but the guy would do things to make you wonder, "Is he serious?" Since he also drank heavily, that covered up just about anything he wanted to do. In fact, until Bob Roop came along, that's what I thought it was. What else was he doing? I didn't know, but I soon came to the

realization that I had a whole crew of dopeheads. "Holy balls!" I said to Bob. "Is there anybody who isn't on the shit?"

Just about everybody was. I was just amazed that was the case. I never dreamed things would get to that point. That lifestyle was so alien to me that it was impossible for me to understand it. And yet, I couldn't lay the law down. I'm not that stupid. How could I fire everybody who was on dope — when just about everybody was on dope? You had to let it go ahead and play things by ear. If someone got messed up enough that he couldn't perform, I would get rid of them, but I didn't fire them until they screwed up in such a way that it affected business. Drug use was so prevalent that if I were to fire everybody that was on some kind of a drug, I wouldn't have had anybody working for me. It would have been Ole Anderson wrestling Bob Roop in a two-hour match every night. So as time went by, I realized what was going on, and holding things together was a constant battle.

I won't embarrass him by mentioning his name, but one guy in particular didn't know what day it was most of the time. I was told that when he was with WCW at TBS, he was incoherent much of the time. When he was in Atlanta with Georgia Championship Wrestling in the early '80s, he used to say to me, "I hate it when you tell people that I'm on dope."

I would look at him and say, "Well?"

He wouldn't have an answer. One time, he actually did cocaine right in the car. We were driving from Asheville to Atlanta. Prior to that, I was sure that he was on it, but now he came out in the open with it. We had just finished working and we were in my car, driving back to Atlanta to make the evening show in the Omni. He looked over at me and said, "I want to ask you something." He was stumbling over his words and mumbling. I had a feeling he wanted to ask me about taking some dope, but I played along and made him say it out loud.

"What do you want?"

"Well-lll."

"Dammit! What is it!?"

He said, "You know, I'm really tired and we have another match coming up. I would feel a lot better, and it would pep me up a little, if I could just take another hit." I was curious to see what he'd do. I never would have allowed it before. I would have beat the hell out of him, or anybody, before I let them do drugs around me, let alone in my car. But because I wanted to see for myself, I said, "Yeah, go ahead."

As I watched, he took a little vial out and — sniff, sniff, sniff. It seemed to me that he was feeling pretty good in a very short time. He began talking and discussing the matches. Thirty minutes or so later, he did it again — but he didn't ask for permission that time. Twenty or 30 minutes later, he did it again — and he didn't ask. I saw it, so

there's no question of me making this up. I sat there and watched him do it.

The first time I ever saw anybody using drugs was in the 1970s. They were all smoking funny cigarettes — marijuana. Gene and I went to a party one night at an apartment in Charlotte. The guys were rolling joints that looked like cigars. I was scared, but I was kind of interested to see what would happen. I don't know how many guys were there, but it was at least ten. The room reeked of that marijuana odor. I never smoked, but Gene, who smoked cigarettes, put a joint in his mouth and sucked it up like it was a lollipop. They always had somebody on the door. Every once in awhile, there would be a knock on the door. Everybody would wave the smoke around and try to hide the joints. By one or two in the morning, I was getting a sore throat from sucking in all the fumes and smoke, so I was ready to go home. I told Gene, "Let's get out of here." As we were walking out, I told all the guys, "That was so much fun. We'll have to do that again." That was

my facetious comment of the evening. I couldn't understand how they could get so excited about doing that stuff. As I drove home, I asked Gene, "Gene, did you get high?"

"Oh, hell no!" he laughed. "That's all in their head." Everybody else was messed up — but Gene? Nothing. I know he inhaled, but it was like he had smoked a Viceroy or Pall Mall. Actually, Gene was so laid back that he probably wouldn't have known he was high if he was. I used to say to him, "Gene, if you ever died, how would we know?"

That was the first and last time that Gene did that. I know it was the first and last time I went to anything like that because I wasn't into smoking anything, let alone marijuana. In addition, I was so worried about being picked up by the cops. Even my curiosity wasn't enough to overcome that.

There were problems other than drugs, too. Matt Borne was teamed with Marty Lunde. Marty

wrestled as Arn Anderson, my cousin, during the ‘80s and ‘90s. When Matt got into trouble, he called and asked for my help. I told him, "Matt, straighten yourself out. If you get into any more trouble, you’re on your own. I won’t know you." Eventually, he wound up in jail in Columbus, Ohio. He called and wanted me to bail him out. "Matt, do you remember what I told you?" I asked.

"Yes," he admitted.

"Goodbye." Click!

When he got out, he had to find another place to work.

Bob Roop probably did more for me than I was aware of. Bob would go out with those guys. I didn’t. Bob spent a lot of time acting as a babysitter to Buzz Sawyer. I know he babysat the Iron Sheik, too. Not that I hired Bob to be the babysitter, but I think he took his job to a level that

I hadn't anticipated. He might have had a more difficult job than I knew. Bob was the one who opened my eyes to the fact that Khosrow Vaziri, the Iron Sheik, was smoking. I was surprised!

Everything with Khosrow Vaziri was a cartoon. He had both good and bad matches, but he was an asset to our company. I was very impressed when he did that routine with the Indian clubs that nobody else could do. Khoz had some heavy clubs that weighed as much as 105 pounds. The clubs had a skinny handle like a baseball bat that was probably 30 inches long. You added circular weights over the handle until you reached the desired weight. Imagine grabbing the handle of a sledgehammer that has a five-pound weight on the end. If you keep stacking weights on the end until you increase the total weight to 90 pounds, or as much as 105 pounds, you have Khosrow's Indian clubs.

Very few people could do anything with Khosrow's clubs. I didn't know anybody who

could flip them around like he did. I could pick them up, but I didn't know what to do with them after I picked them up. You had to have the ability to handle them. Even if you did figure it out, you still had to have the strength to handle them. Khosrow used to challenge the people to juggle them, to duplicate what he did with them. I remember the guys trying it. The clubs would hit them on the head. It was comical because Khosrow wasn't worried about the person getting hurt or getting hit in the head with the clubs. He was constantly worried about somebody dropping the clubs and damaging them.

Khoz wasn't so terribly strong that he could do so much more with his grip than anyone else. Danny Hodge has as strong a grip as anyone I know, but I don't think it had as much to do with the grip as it was the coordination. Yes, you had to be strong, but you had to know the technique and have the coordination to twirl those Indian clubs overhead. If you started out with a 20-pound set of clubs, you might be able to develop the rhythm you

need to do it.

Back to the drugs — that was one place where all my principles went into the toilet, but I only had two options. I could have fired everybody and had nothing, or just kept going and hope I had enough stroke that they didn't get so messed up that it would cause us some serious problems, legal or otherwise. For the most part, it worked like that, but I would say that by the time 1984 rolled around, things were pretty much out of control. The guys still made the shows, but there were more and more difficulties between shows and on the days off.

For instance, we had more car wrecks. We used to provide the guys with cars, usually a Lincoln — four guys to a car. One night, while I was driving back to Columbus, Ohio, from Cleveland, we saw a car, upside down in the median. When I realized it was a Lincoln, I thought, Oh, my God. Don't let it be one of our guys. It was Tommy Rich and three other guys. The cops said, "Listen, we have

to arrest him. He's been drinking or using drugs. It has to be one or the other or both."

"As a favor to me," I pleaded, "could you please just arrest him for drunk."

They agreed.

I knew a girl in Columbus who worked for a firm of attorneys. She set things up and they agreed to take the case. I think we paid them $1,500, maybe $2,000. "See what you can do," I asked. Well, the attorneys did one hell of a job. We not only avoided the drug charge, but Tommy got out of the drunk charge. Several months later, Tommy denied that he had taken drugs, or that he had been drunk. Eventually, he didn't remember being in the accident. That was how messed up he was. Instead of saying, "Thank you for getting me out of the drug charge," which it would have been, "and the drunk charge," which it should have been, he wouldn't even acknowledge it. "I wasn't guilty of anything. I wasn't even in that accident." I still

have a copy of the police report from the accident that Tommy "wasn't" in. Tommy didn't learn anything from the incident. He went right along the same path he had been following before the accident. That kind of thing happened several times. If the guys didn't wreck the cars, they would trash them. It got so bad that several rental agencies told me that they didn't want our business.

Kevin von Erich was another one who walked around in a daze. "Hi, I'm Kevin von Erich. How are you?"

"I'm fine, Kevin, and I'm still Ole Anderson, just like I was when I met you five minutes ago on the other side of the room."

I had other problems, too. I had the Road Warriors, who may not have been on dope, but they were on steroids. They were going to fight Buzz Sawyer and his brother, Bret. There were a few times that I had to tell the four of them, "Come

on, you guys. This is business. You can fight each other when you're on your own time." In one town, the two teams were booked against each other, so I went into the ring as the special referee, just to make sure they wouldn't get into some kind of fracas with each other. There I was, acting as a babysitter for four grown men. They were pushing each other back and forth, acting like a bunch of spoiled kids. I tried to get them to work, but they weren't interested in doing that. I got so mad that I finally said, "All right, you bastards. Go ahead and shoot! Let's just see who the hell can beat who."

Bret didn't want any part of it, but Buzz figured he was going to dismantle both of the Road Warriors. When it came right down to it, though, it even gave Buzz a bit of a pause. If it was just one guy, Buzz probably wouldn't have had a whole lot of problem with him, but the fact that it was two guys might have made him back up a little to assess the situation before he jumped in. The shoot only lasted a matter of seconds before they all settled

back and went to work. The Road Warriors settled down, Buzz backed off, and Bret was happy. They went ahead and had a match.

At one time or another, just about everybody was on steroids, too. Ivan Koloff weighed more than 300 pounds when he was on the sauce. He was big, he looked good, and he wore boots with high heels. That pushed him up to 5-11, maybe. I think I'm the only guy who wasn't on the stuff — ever! I wanted to go home to my son and be able to tell him, "No, I never took a thing," and I never did. When I got up to 280 pounds, I had to eat like a horse. In 1967, I ate three dozen eggs, two pounds of hamburger, and drank three gallons of milk a day. I hit 12,000 calories a day.

In 1971, the St. Petersburg Times did an article in the Parade magazine. We were selling out the Bayfront Center in St. Petersburg just about every time we ran there. When you open up the magazine to the center section, my head and shoulders completely filled those two pages. At the bottom

of the page, it said, "Giant Ole Anderson challenges Jack Brisco." When I went to work for TBS in 1992, I had my son bring the article down to the gym. I told the guys I was working out with, "You guys are all 6-foot-4, 6-foot-5. You're all on steroids — all blown up. But I'll bet you never had an article like this. When has anyone ever referred to you as a giant? I did that without steroids." Of course, the newspaper had to ruin the piece by reporting that I had lost to Jack Brisco in Miami the night before. It was a little bit of an expose, so Eddie Graham was mad about it.

It was one hell of a time. Look at a list of the guys I had working for me during that time. Who did I have that wasn't on something?

Just Bob Roop and me! And I'm not too sure about Bob.

Just kidding, Bob.

Chapter 34
Too Many Chiefs

Vince eventually had everyone thinking that, because he was from New York, he knew everything about everything. Even the people in Atlanta who worked for Ted Turner began having questions as to whether or not we could run the business. Vince was a multi-millionaire and we weren't. It stood to reason that he must know more than we did.

It got to the point where Vince was talking to the guys, calling everybody up and saying, "Hey, why do you want to continue working for Ole? To hell with him! Come up here. I'm gonna have finger dolls and all kinds of gimmicks." If a wrestling promoter told a wrestler that he would guarantee him 50-cents more per match, the guy would pack up his family and move. But in this case, Vince was offering the guys $50,000, $60,000, and more

— just on gimmicks like thumb dolls. Who would have thought that would ever happen?

And the worst thing about it is — the dolls made money. Vince's idea worked.

I was the only promoter who was really getting beat up at the time, but I knew it was just a matter of time before Vince McMahon Jr. began encroaching on the other territories. I constantly grumbled and complained to the other promoters about Vince coming into our territory. Eventually, several of the promoters decided to have a meeting to see what could be done — me, Jimmy Crockett, Eddie Graham, Bill Watts, Verne, Bob Geigel, and a few others. We came to the conclusion that if we pooled all our talent, we could stop McMahon dead in his tracks. Everybody was agreeable and thought we could combine our resources to run against Vince.

Verne invited Eddie Einhorn to the meeting we had in Chicago. This was sometime around March

1984. Einhorn is part-owner of the Chicago White Sox. He was extremely successful in the TV sports syndication business and created the Chicago Sportsvision, a predecessor to ESPN. In the '70s, he formed a professional wrestling promotion and ran opposition to Jim Crockett Sr. in the Carolinas. Eddie hired Pedro Martinez, the promoter of the Buffalo territory, to do the booking for him, using guys like Ivan Koloff, Ernie Ladd, and Thunderbolt Patterson. They ran against us, we ran against them. Sometimes we ran the same towns on the same day. That was how Eddie Einhorn came into the picture. Einhorn was a genius when it came to marketing professional baseball, but in my opinion, he didn't know anything about professional wrestling. Basically, the only thing I remember out of my talk with Einhorn was me asking him, "Why would we want to listen to you? You already ran your wrestling business into the toilet. What makes you think you know anything now?"

Of course, nobody could agree on

anything. Verne liked the idea of everyone pooling their talent, but Verne also thought he should run things. Watts thought he should be in charge. Crockett thought he didn't need anybody else, so he said, "Hell, I'm doing fine. Why do I need you guys?" Bob Geigel was along for the ride. Eddie Graham just sat there shaking his head. He was fighting his own personal problems. The only guy who went along with anything we wanted to do was Don Owen from Oregon, and he never came to a meeting. He just said, "Whatever you want to do, Ole, you can count me in." We met several times in places like Tampa, Atlanta, Chicago, and St. Louis.

Everything went straight to hell in that Chicago meeting. Bill Watts threatened to kick my ass. Jerry Jarrett took me aside and said, "Bill told me that he was going to beat the hell out of you." Jerry continued by saying that he told Bill, "I told him that I've seen a few shoots in my time, and usually the guy who thinks he's going to do the kicking is the one who gets theirs kicked." It

doesn't really matter what might have happened because nothing did.

Bill did that periodically. He would call from Oklahoma to tell me he was mad about something, so he was going to come kick my ass. Of course, I was booking Bill and sending him plane tickets to Atlanta on a regular basis, so I would say, "Quit threatening me on the phone. You're supposed to be here on Friday. I'll see you then." Bill never followed through. The problem with Watts all stemmed from the fact that I was supposed to pay him $100,000 for his points in the Atlanta promotion. By the time McMahon came in, I hadn't paid Watts the full amount. I tried to keep Bill quiet because I didn't want McMahon to know about our agreement. Well, McMahon found out, anyway. I gave Bill his money.

Years later, one of the guys working for Vince told me, "When Vince first heard about the promoters getting together, he was a little worried. He thought all of you together might have

caused him some trouble. Then he gave it a second thought and realized that you promoters all had such big egos that you would never be able to agree on anything, so he just laughed about it." Ultimately, that's what kept us from succeeding. That's exactly what it was. Nobody could agree on anything. "Who's gonna run this?" "Who's gonna run that?" Verne Gagne, Bill Watts, Jimmy Crockett — each of them thought they should run it.

The situation reminded me of the NWA meetings that I attended. Nothing of any consequence happened at those meetings, and I went to all the meetings from 1977 on. The boys all thought the promoters got together to discuss talent. The truth is, there was hardly any talk about the boys. It was really just an excuse to have a good time. It was a time for the promoters to brag to each other about how well their territory was doing and who they had laid. They drank, ate, gambled, and had a good time. The promoters had worthless meetings where they reported on important issues like who

had forgotten to pay their 50 bucks to maintain their membership in the NWA. They discussed bookings for the world champion. The champions made an appearance at the meetings and occasionally made a speech. The only people who thought the meetings had any real significance were the Japanese promoters.

The NWA promoters' meetings might have been better organized and run more effectively years ago, but I doubt it. There was always talk of the promoters blackballing wrestlers who didn't go along with their program. In his book, Hooker, even Lou mentions being blackballed. I already told you the story about Ernie Holmes. When Ernie told me that I would have him blackballed, I just laughed, because I knew that was a crock. None of those promoters could ever get together on anything. If a promoter called another promoter and said, "Don't use so-and-so," I never heard it. If a promoter thought someone was good enough to make him money, that was what counted. They didn't care what the other

promoters said about the guy. They all thought they could handle people better than their colleagues could.

When I was promoting, I had promoters calling my talent all the time, trying to persuade them to leave me and come to work for them. I had wrestlers calling me from other territories. Killer Karl Kox got me in a little trouble with Bill Watts when Kox called and said, "I want to come in and work for you."

"Fine," I agreed. "After you give Watts your notice, let me know!" Karl told Bill Watts that I called him and was trying to steal him from Bill. Bill called me and said, "You godda– son-of-a-bitch!" Of course, that was just one of the many times he did that. I was honest with him. "Bill, I never tried to steal Kox. He told me he was going to leave, so I told him to give me a call when he was finished with you. What else would you have me say to the guy?" Kox did that to work a little program with Bill, trying to

squeeze more money out of him. Instead of getting $45, he might get $50.

But it's hard for me to imagine that anybody was really worried about being blackballed. Was it possible that a promoter would get mad at you and say, "We're not gonna use you?" Yeah! That happened, and it happened quite often. But did the fact that Sam Muchnick wouldn't use you in St. Louis mean you couldn't get work in Los Angeles? No.

Regardless, I think a coalition of promoters might have worked. We could have appointed someone to be the booker and let him run the top towns — Minneapolis, Atlanta, Tampa, or wherever. If the guy didn't do the job, we would get rid of him and let somebody else run it. Between all of us, we should have been able to put on a good show. The proof that we could do well was when we ran a show in the Meadowlands. We didn't even have a TV to promote it. All we had was an insignificant station in Jersey that I picked up through some guys

who were supposedly connected with the Mafia. It was a nothing station. For lack of anything better, we put promos on TBS for three weeks, promoting the fact that we were coming to the Meadowlands. Crockett, Ralph and I were the ones who set up the building, but Crockett really took the lead.

I booked most of the show, but nothing was programmed. There was no programmed anything. We just put names together. Crockett and I talked to Carlos Colon and Victor Jovica and used some of their guys from Puerto Rico. We pooled the talent we had available and put a card together.

I didn't go to that show. I was so mad about everything because it really became a clusterf —. Crockett stepped in and put the money up for the building. Since he put down the deposit for the building, he thought he should be in charge. That didn't sit well with me, so Ralph Freed went to the show and I went home.

We had an advance of something like 22,000 people. On the night of the show, it was pouring rain, so there was hardly any walkup. I'm told that's typical of New York, but even so, it was a fantastic house. The date was May 29, 1984. I remember the time frame because that was when I had finally come to the realization that we were going to court. There was a good possibility that we could lose Georgia Championship Wrestling.

Regardless of which promoter did what, we proved that we could do very good business against McMahon. We were doing fantastic business in Baltimore. We were burning Cleveland up! But everybody was so concerned about the insignificant details that affected their own little piece of the world. Who was going to be the head honcho? How would we count the money? Whose talent was going to be used and in what way? How were they going to run their own territory in the meantime?

It all went down the tubes.

Chapter 35
Omerta

I'm going to go back to January 1983. One of the first things I did after I officially took control of Georgia Championship Wrestling was to hire Jerry Brisco to work for the company. I think I was paying Jerry $750 a week to work the territory, which was more than he was drawing at the house shows. He didn't like it. He didn't think that was enough. As a minority stockholder, he also was getting a dividend check at the end of each month. Of course, he didn't get any for the first four months because we didn't have any dividends to pay out. I was trying to pay back the money that the company owed so we could keep our TVs on the air and keep our towns intact.

Jack and Jerry Brisco didn't have any concept of what it took to run a business. They just didn't understand the details. When you're booking 45 to

90 days in advance, you have to come up with the money to secure the buildings. You have to make deposits with every building. The building managers don't say, "Sure, Ole. We'll keep open dates on the building for you. When do you want to run it?" No. They send you a contract that calls for a security deposit. They might pencil your date down in advance, but when you get within a few months of that date, they want their deposit. In Atlanta, we were putting down $15,000 to $20,000. In Columbus, Ohio, the deposit was $8,000 to $10,000. We put down another $10,000 to secure the building in Cleveland. The big one was the Meadowlands. They wanted $75,000 — for one deposit!

There was a time factor involved, too. In each building, you often had two deposits outstanding. The normal procedure was to have two months ahead. If you were lucky, they allowed you to work just one month ahead. When you got to the point where you were doing business on a regular basis, they might be willing to say,

"All right. We want the deposit two weeks before the show." That varied. In Atlanta, you could probably get by with two weeks, but that was only because I knew Bob Dhue and the other people who managed the building. We had been doing business with them for several years, so they would let things slide, but you couldn't do that everywhere because a lot of people wanted to make sure that you were going to be there. They didn't want you calling up and saying, "Hey, we changed our mind about running next week."

The buildings weren't the only drain on our finances. If you're booking your dates ahead of time, you have to pay for newspaper advertising. You need cash for a lot of those things, but Jack and Jerry weren't able to comprehend that.

We still owed a lot of money. You had to have enough money to secure all the buildings, and then you had to pay the wrestlers, buy plane tickets, pay for car rentals and advertising, etc. There were a

whole lot of things that had to be paid for to make pro wrestling work. I was going nuts! We owed so much money that I was worried that Barnett might throw in the towel and close the business. In my mind, it was Australia all over again. Pack your bags, close the doors, and go home. Instead, I took control of the company and tried to turn things around so we could keep the business.

When I tried to explain this to Jack and Jerry, they couldn't grasp the concept. It wasn't long before $750 a week wasn't enough for them. They tried to hold me up at the matches and demanded $1,200 a week.

Now, I'm sure this question is in the back of your mind. "Well, gee whiz! Here you are, telling us that you were in the hole, yet you were paying yourself $2,000 a week and main event money. Why couldn't you pay the Briscos $1,200 a week?" In fact, Barnett tried to discredit me by telling people that I was paying myself too much. What he didn't take into account was the

fact that he, and I'm talking about Barnett, set my salary years before. The salary that I was paid, which I agree was respectable, was given to me by Barnett. Regardless of what I was being paid, once I took over, the company began making money again and we paid our debts.

Finally, in defense of myself, in all the years that I ran that place, everybody made money. Barnett used to say, "Ole's very difficult, but we are making money." And that's all I thought anybody cared about, anyway — making money.

Regardless of all that, even I cut back. Barnett was paying me $2,400 a week. I took it upon myself to cut it back to $2,000.

You might also say, "Jack Brisco drew a lot of money." Well, sure he did, but as far as I know, Jack didn't have two words to say about anything when he worked for Eddie. "Jack, here's what we want you to do. Get in the ring and do it." That's all. When Jack was pulling in huge crowds in

Florida, Eddie Graham guided him, directed him. Jack listened — and he did one hell of a job. He had great success as a wrestler. Every match that I saw Jack participate in, he was outstanding. However, as I said, I don't think he had much to say about what he did. When Jack was the world champion, he had even less to do. It was simply a matter of getting into the ring with the hottest heel, letting the heel lead the match, and then beating the guy. Jack was never in a position where he had to think about how he was going to make his next buck. All he had to do was look at his booking sheet and see that he had to be in St. Louis the following week. If they had a good house, Jack drew it. If it was a bad house, somebody screwed up. That's all.

The point I'm trying to make is, as far as I know, Jack had very little to say about handling his matches, and he didn't have any experience in handling the rest of the matches on the card or the televisions. He was strictly limited to being able to perform in his matches, which he did admirably.

Jerry didn't even have that advantage because Jerry had very few matches that were considered to be on-top matches. Jerry was always considered to be an underneath guy — semi-final or beneath. I hired Jerry as an agent. His job was to line up the spot shows and the buildings in small towns, as well as check on some of the TV programs. I don't remember how long he did that, but it wasn't too long. I had people call up and say, "Hey, I thought you were going to have your representative come down here today." On other occasions, I called a station manager in the afternoon and asked, "How did it go this morning? Were you pleased with the tape? Were you able to make arrangements that were suitable for everybody?"

"What do you mean?" the manager asked.

"Well, didn't Jerry Brisco show up this morning?"

"No, we haven't seen him."

He missed several appointments because he was still in bed at midday. I told him, "Jerry, you just can't do that." That's where we really got sideways with each other. I guess he thought we were going to make a lot of money, and I was going to pay him a lot of money to do a lot of nothing — but I didn't.

There was a time when Buzz Sawyer wanted to help with the booking, an idea that Jerry and a lot of other people were terribly against. Jerry had aspirations of his own. That led to Jerry's next scheme, which was to ask if he could run the territory. "Why can't I do what you're doing?"

I simply told him the truth. "Jerry, I'd love to do your job, running a few towns, and let you run mine, but you don't know enough about the business. You can't even get out of bed before eleven o'clock in the morning to do the things you're supposed to do because you're too screwed up when you go to bed at night. If you could do the job, I'd just as soon let you do it and have you send

me $750 a week to run a few towns and do next to nothing, just like I send it to you. I'd trade positions with you right now, but I know damn well that the business will drop dead." I would have had just as much chance of it succeeding if I had a monkey run it.

If Jerry had been able to run the company, I would have taken the $750 a week and gone to work somewhere else. I would have called Verne and offered to work for him. I would still get my $750 a week. I could have worked for Roy Shire in San Francisco and still collected my $750 a week. I would work for Jim Crockett and find my $750 waiting in the mailbox for me every week. The difference between the two of us is that I could get myself booked somewhere else. I don't think Jerry was in demand to go anywhere.

Before I took control of the company, I used to call Jack and Jerry two or three times a week from wherever I was, just to tell them what was going on because the company was in serious financial

trouble, which is why they originally agreed to let me take control of the company. That really wasn't anything out of the ordinary during that time. Several of the territories were having financial problems. By this time, though, the Brisco boys had apparently forgotten about those financial details. All they knew was that they weren't getting their dividends, so they blamed it all on me.

By the summer of 1983, the company had somewhere around $200,000 in the bank. When Jack and Jerry asked what the account balance was, I told them. Do you think they gave any thought to operating expenses? No! They wanted me to withdraw the 200 grand and make dividends for everybody according to the percentage of stock they owned. I said, "That's a great idea. I'd be happy to do it. In fact, I'm all for it. I own ten points, so that means I could write myself a $20,000 dividend check. Now, I only have one question before we do this. If we spend it all, how am I gonna run the business?"

Things finally came to a head in February 1984. The Briscos let me know that they wanted to meet with me, so we set up a meeting at the Ramada Inn on Central Avenue in Atlanta. Before I went over there, I called the Road Warriors and Buzz Sawyer, just in case the Briscos had any thoughts about double-teaming me and trying to rough me up.

I was well aware of the confrontation that Ernie Ladd had with the Briscos when they were all wrestling in Florida. According to Ernie, they were sitting in Ernie's car behind the Tampa Sportatorium and the Briscos were mad at Ernie about something. Ernie suspected there might be trouble because it was rumored that the Briscos had jumped other wrestlers when they got upset with them over something. Ernie said, "Hey, do you guys want a smoke?" Or something along those lines. He looked in the glove compartment and there was nothing there. He looked in the back seat and there was nothing there. "I must have put it in the trunk," Ernie concluded.

He went to the trunk and opened the lid. He found what he was looking for — the tire iron. As he pulled the tire iron out, one of the Briscos came at him from the front. As he swung the tire iron up over his head to hit whichever Brisco it was, it beaned the other guy coming up behind him. He then whacked the guy in the front. Both of the Briscos were laid out. Jack was moaning, "Oh, Jerry ..." Ernie said he picked them both up and drove off to find a hospital.

Can you imagine? A 6-foot-9, 315-pound black guy carrying around two white guys who have been hit with a tire iron, claiming self-defense, and trying to get some help without being arrested. Ernie told me, "That was a tough thing to explain."

Now the Briscos wanted to meet with me. I felt sure that it was going to be a setup and their plans were to jump me, so I wanted somebody close by just in case. I wasn't going to put myself into a position like Ernie found himself in. We had

already had some heated words back and forth about things during the past year. Jerry was always the one who did the yelling. For the most part, Jack was low-keyed. "Well, you know, Ole. We thought ..."

On the day of the meeting, I called Hawk, Animal, and Buzz Sawyer, and told them that I had changed my mind. "You guys forget about it. I'm going to meet the Briscos alone."

Jack and Jerry were already there when I walked into the lounge. We had one or two beers while Jerry said things like, "You know, Ole, I really like you. We both like you, but gee whiz. Why can't we ...?" He was back on the subject of wanting more money.

I tried to explain it all again. "Listen, there isn't any money to have at the moment. We're struggling and trying to stay alive. We have Vince McMahon eating our TVs up left and right." To repeat what I already said, yes, I was still making

two grand. I never changed that. Again, I guess the case can be made. "If Ole was so concerned about saving the company, I guess he should have cut his pay to $1,000." No. I was going to make what I was going to make and that was the end of it because I was running the company and it was a hard job. I spent every waking hour working on the business.

They were booked in the hotel, so we all agreed to go up to their room to finish our talk. This is when I assumed they were going to jump me.

Jack was in his usual comatose state. Jerry was still telling me how much he liked me, but also how he thought I was too difficult to deal with. "I don't deny that," I agreed, "but I have a job to do. What I want to know is, are we going to agree to get along? Are we going to agree to stick together on this?" They both agreed.

I looked at them and asked, "Do either of you have a knife?" One of them had a small

pocketknife, so I said, "We'll do just like the Mafia does. We'll do a Mafia blood oath and mix my blood with your blood. This will be our pledge to swear loyalty and obedience to each other, just like the Mafia does."

Talk about high school. Talk about sophomoric. Talk about juvenile. Even though I realized that it was a childish thing to do, I was still going to do it. For all I knew, it might even mean something. I never considered it to be binding. Certainly, it wasn't a legal contract, but the fact remains, I did do it. So what was I thinking? We were like three 15-year-old kids, talking about mixing our blood. Later, I read a statement where Jack said that I was drunk. I wasn't drunk — but I was old enough to know better.

Nevertheless, I took the knife, stuck the point in my forehead, angled the blade down a little, and pulled it across. Now, you have to remember. Jack doesn't like to get juice

[blood]. Jerry doesn't either. They were both frozen in time, looking at me like they were going to faint. They just stood there, dumbfounded. My guess was, neither one of them was too anxious to follow my lead. I handed the knife to Jack, but he just stared at it. I said, "Dammit, here's what you do! There's nothing to it." I took the knife back, stabbed myself in the head again, and pulled the blade across. Jack finally agreed to do it. He put the blade up to his forehead and whined as he stuck it in.

A gnat couldn't survive on the amount of blood that came out of Jack's head. Jerry didn't do much better.

I couldn't believe it. I hit my head a third time and said, "That's how you do it!" When they finally did get it, I pressed my thumb into my blood and rubbed it on their forehead, and then rubbed their blood on mine.

I said, "Now here's the deal. We've all agreed

that we're going to do the best we can to make Georgia Championship Wrestling a success. We're not going to complain about the payoffs. When I finally get some more money in the till, we'll make the dispersal and you'll get your check based on your points."

One thing led to another and we all agreed that we were just going to hang tough and wait, because I felt that in a matter of another few months, it would be summer and we were probably going to do big business. Everybody said "Domino Zbyszcum" and that was the end of it. A few minutes later, I walked out of the room.

One thing is for certain. I had been watching too many Mafia movies.

Chapter 36
Articles of Incorporation

Georgia Championship Wrestling was a Subchapter S corporation. When I took over, I studied all the Articles of Incorporation. The entire document was 20-some pages of legal gobbledygook. I was concerned about the wording of the Buy-Sell agreement. The Buy-Sell agreement stated, "If a stockholder wants to sell stock in Georgia Championship Wrestling, they must first offer it to another stockholder. If none of the stockholders want to purchase the stock, then they can agree to allow that holder to sell it to someone outside, subject to the approval of the other stockholders."

Well, "Honest Jim" Barnett had been violating that article all along because he had been selling

stock to Jim Oates. However, everyone chose to overlook it.

The Buy-Sell agreement also said, "If a majority of the stockholders decide to rescind the Buy-Sell agreement, they can do so." I took that clause to mean that if 51 percent of the stockholders get together and decide they don't want to live by the Buy-Sell agreement, they can change it.

I got nervous about that, so I took the Articles of Incorporation to our attorneys, who were also the attorneys for Ted Turner. Barnett had retained them because he wanted us to have the same attorneys that Ted Turner had. He thought that would buy a few brownie points. After I had explained my misgivings, one of the partners looked at me and said, "Oh, no. They can't do that. When you bought your stock from Bill Watts, he had to get the approval of the other stockholders. They all had the right of first refusal. If the other stockholders wanted to buy it, they could have. Then they all had to agree to

allow you to buy it. This article doesn't change anything."

I played the devil's advocate. "Yeah, but it says, 'If a majority of the stockholders decide to rescind the Buy-Sell agreement, they can do so.' It doesn't say they can't. It says they can. It says that 51% of the stockholders can rescind the Buy-Sell agreement. The rest of the pages in the agreement say that the stockholders have the right of first refusal, or that the stockholders can prevent a non-stockholder from buying if they so choose. But all those pages don't mean squat. This one paragraph says they can rescind all the gibberish that's written in the other eighteen pages."

The attorneys said, "No, no, no. Listen, you're not an attorney. You don't know about these things. We've always gone by the Buy-Sell agreement and they have to abide by that. Even though this document says that a majority of the stockholders can change things, they can't do that. It has to be with stockholder approval. The

company has been abiding by these articles for the past ten years."

I pressed them on the subject. "Are you sure?" They assured me that there was no problem. Stockholder approval takes precedence over the "majority" clause. I took them at their word, but just to make sure, I took the document to another group of attorneys. They told me the same thing our attorneys did. "We went over the contract with a fine tooth comb and you don't have anything to worry about. Nobody can sell their stock without first offering it to the other owners. If the other owners don't want to buy it, they still have to give their approval before the stock can be sold to an outside interest."

Not only did they agree with our primary attorneys, but they talked to me with the same patronizing attitude. "You're not an attorney. What do you know?"

"Do you mean, if one guy disagrees, they can't

sell it?"

"Exactly," they said.

"All right." As far as I was concerned, the case was closed. I could forget about it and get back to work.

Chapter 37
Lawyer Jokes Are Based on Fact

Vince McMahon took control of everything by buying the Atlanta territory right out from under me. I'm guessing at this, but I believe someone persuaded Jim Barnett to send a copy of our Articles of Incorporation to him. For all I know, he could have taken the initiative to do it out of spite. Vince tsent it to his attorneys, who saw the same thing that I did. "If a majority of the stockholders decide to rescind the Buy-Sell agreement, they can do so."

You can study all 20-plus pages of the Articles and argue all the fine points and nuances. When you get to the bottom line, that one little paragraph destroys the whole document. If you can get 51 percent of the stockholders to go along with you,

you can do whatever you want with the stock.

In March 1984, my mother died. I called Jerry Brisco and said, "My mother has died, so I'm gonna be in Minnesota for a week. I'll call every day and you can let me know what's going on. Here's the number where you can reach me." While I was gone, several of the board members held a quick, late-at-night meeting. McMahon reached an agreement with the shareholders of Georgia Championship Wrestling. His ace in the hole was Jim Barnett. I don't know when Barnett began to conspire with Vince McMahon, but it was probably as early as the summer of 1983. At that time, nobody really knew how many points Barnett had in the company because he had been selling them to everybody. I don't think Barnett had anything left when Vince McMahon began his little takeover program in 1983, but at the time, we thought he did. At one point, Barnett held somewhere around 25 to 30 points, but it's possible that he sold some or all of them to Jack Brisco, Jerry Brisco, and Jim

Oates. I think Jerry also bought Buddy Colt's points. If Barnett actually had any points left, he sold them to McMahon.

Vince also used Barnett to gain control of the points owned by Jim Oates. Ralph and I had both talked to Oates in January 1984 because we were concerned that he might stay loyal to Barnett. I don't remember if we had already heard rumors about the Briscos talking to McMahon, but we wanted to be assured that Oates would stick with us so we could continue in the direction we were going. We never knew how many points Oates had because they were constantly flowing back and forth between himself and Barnett. It's possible that he sold some to Jack and some to Jerry. Regardless, just a few days before the takeover took place, we talked to Oates again and he assured both Ralph Freed and me that he was going to hang in there with us in the event of a showdown. He even told us how upset he was that Barnett was trying to sell us out. But at the same time, he was being courted by James E.

Vince's other ace in the hole was Jack and Jerry Brisco, who he also convinced to go along with the deal. Together, the Briscos must have owned somewhere around 15 percent of the company. I heard that McMahon gave them $600,000 for their points, but who knows what the amount really was. The only people who know the real figure are the Briscos and Vince. If it was $600,000, I don't know if that was for one or for both. So much for swearing blood oaths of loyalty and obedience.

I would like to stop here for a second and give Jack and Jerry the benefit of the doubt. I don't want anyone to get the wrong impression of the Brisco boys. I don't want you to assume they had such little character that they would break a blood oath without good reason. In my mind, when I play back the events that took place in the Ramada Inn Hotel room, where we swore our loyalty and obedience to each other, I seem to remember Jack and Jerry each having one hand behind their back when we took the oath. I didn't think anything

about it then, but now I realize that they must have had their fingers crossed.

That's the key to the whole thing right there! If that's the case, I don't hold anything against Jack and Jerry for going back on the pledge they made. I understand things completely. I'm sure the Mafia people do that when they take the blood oath of "omerta," swearing their loyalty and obedience to the Mafia under penalty of death for betrayal.

"Big Julie, for breaking the code of omerta, you will sleep with the fishes."

"But, Godfather! I had my fingers crossed."

"Oh, I didn't know that. Okay, just don't let it happen again."

Even Paul Jones, the old figurehead promoter in Atlanta, was in on it. Paul still owned a hefty percentage of the promotion. If only Paul Jones and his wife knew how much Barnett disliked Paul Jones. We were at an NWA meeting in Las Vegas

one year and Barnett left Paul wandering around the parking lot. The temperature was a sweltering 103 degrees. I looked around and saw Paul staggering in the heat. I took Paul by the arm and pulled him inside the building to save him from dying of heat stroke.

The dynamics between Jim Barnett and Paul Jones were peculiar. Jim didn't want the public to recognize Paul Jones because Paul Jones was no longer the promoter in Atlanta. Jim Barnett was the promoter. On the other hand, Barnett didn't want people to know that he [Barnett] was the promoter. I would put Paul Jones on television because he was an authoritative former wrestler who had been around for years. His appearance would lend credibility to whatever was being said and, hopefully, help draw some money. I could bring him onto the set and, as the promoter, he could make a brief statement about a situation. Paul Jones loved to be on TV. He loved to be the guy who was gladhanding and greeting the fans from time to time. What did that cost

us? Nothing!

I would have been happy to do that with Barnett, but he didn't want to be on TV. And besides, Paul was better because he was a former wrestler and he was credible. However, when I did put Paul on television, Barnett would go nuts. "Oh, why do you have him on TV?" Even though Barnett didn't want to be on TV, by the same token, he didn't want Paul Jones on, either.

By the time Vince took over, though, Paul was out of touch and didn't know much of what was going on around him, so they talked to Paul's wife. She didn't know anything about wrestling and didn't care about wrestling. I assume she was just happy to get some money.

Vince offered to buy the other stockholders out. "I'll take over and give you guys a job." Of course, that was one of the reasons Barnett needed because he didn't have a job — at least, not with Georgia Championship Wrestling — and he

wanted one. He didn't have a source of income.

The other shareholders, who were not offered to be bought out by Vince, were Fred Ward, Ralph Freed, Gene Anderson, and myself. By this time, we had become minority stockholders. My recollection is that Gene bought his two-and-a-half points from Timmy Woods, who was given two-and-a-half points when the National Wrestling Alliance became embroiled in a promotional war with Ann Gunkel's promotion. Fred Ward still owned around 30 percent of the company, while I held the 10 percent I had bought from Bill Watts.

As I said earlier, I had gone back to Minnesota because my mother had died. Two days after I left for Minnesota, I got a call from Louise Bennett, who was our secretary. Louise was crying. "Ole, Ole. They took our company."

"What are you talking about?" I asked. "Who took our company?"

"McMahon!"

Either McMahon came down to Atlanta or everybody went up to New York. I'm not sure where the meeting took place, but a meeting was held and a vote was taken. Ralph Freed, Fred Ward, Gene Anderson, and myself were not invited. We didn't even know about the meeting. Vince ended up with more than 51 percent of the stock in the Subchapter S Corporation called Georgia Championship Wrestling, giving him controlling interest. Regardless of the percentage, they voted to rescind the Buy-Sell agreement. I no longer had control of Georgia Championship Wrestling. It ended right there.

I flew back to Atlanta and went right over to talk to our esteemed attorneys. We had attorneys up the ying-yang. They were all telling me that it just couldn't happen — just like they had told me all along. "It can't be done." They filed an injunction with the courts and assured me that when we went

back to court, I would have full control of the company again and Vince would be out. I repeated what I had said when I first began arguing with them about the Articles. "Dammit! This Buy-Sell agreement is just what I was talking about a year ago. It says that if a majority of the stockholders decide to rescind it, they can! And that's what they've done!"

They still refused to accept it. "No, they can't do that. They can't do it that way."

At that point, here's what they proposed to me. They said, "We need $160,000 to proceed." I had already been prohibited by a judge, who had ruled on the case pending in court, to write any checks for more than $2,000, unless I got approval by the court. Now my attorney was telling me, "Write us a check for $160,000."

"How can I do that?" I asked. "I have a court injunction against me. It tells me specifically — I can't write a company check for more than

$2,000."

"Backdate it," they advised me.

"Are you kidding?"

"You'll be all right, as long as you date it before the date of the judge's order." They put it to me this way. "Would you rather spend $160,000 to save your $6 million business, or would you rather not spend $160,000 and lose your $6 million business? Which do you think is the smart course of action to take? Is it worth spending $160,000 to make $6 million?"

I talked to Ralph about it and we paid the $160,000 — but we spent our own money.

At the time, we had a little more than $200,000 in the company bank account — and we were debt free. That was another thing that Jack and Jerry were angry about. They knew I had money in the account. By that time, we were doing well and had turned things around. I had paid off our debt and

had $200,000 in the bank. We were paying our bills again. For the most part, we had our finances in order to take us into the summer season. Just like before, when they discovered that our bills were paid and we had more than $200,000, they wanted it. "Let's distribute the money!"

I said, "You idiots don't understand. I need to have cash in order to run this business. You can have complete access to the books. When we have another hundred thousand, I'll give it to you." That was the way I left it, but they didn't like it. Before we were able to add any cash to the coffers, they made their deal with McMahon. I don't know how long they had been conspiring with McMahon, but I'm assuming it had been quite awhile.

Our first hearing was in front of the judge. By that time, I had so many attorneys, I could hardly count them all. I was still trying to sue Barnett to get the money that he owed me. I also had several attorneys representing Georgia Championship Wrestling, and several attorneys, who had heard

about the hearing, were just hanging around, who had stopped in because they wanted to watch. So I had attorneys who were representing me, and the corporation, and they had their attorneys, and on and on and on. The bottom line is, I had attorneys all over the place.

The attorney for Georgia Championship Wrestling stood up in front of the judge and said, "Your Honor. Georgia Championship Wrestling has always abided by the Buy-Sell agreement. Vince McMahon came down and they had a meeting at 11:02. By 11:03, they had rescinded the Buy-Sell agreement. We protest and say this is an illegal action." He went on and on and on. Blah-blah-blah-blah-blah-blah-blah-blah-blah.

Do you know what the judge said?

I'm glad you asked.

He said, "Look up paragraph nine, page twenty-

two. ‘If a majority of the stockholders decide to rescind the Buy-Sell agreement ...’"

I absolutely went out of my mind. The judge cited the exact words that I had brought to our attorneys attention when I questioned the Buy-Sell agreement. The attorneys lost the case on the very article that I mentioned to them at the beginning. The legal experts were too damned dumb to see it, even after I pointed it out to them. Ralph, Fred, and all of us had discussed it. When I first saw it, I knew it was no good. It said that if a majority gets together, they can change the bylaws. I should have done what I knew was right. I shoulda, I shoulda, I shoulda, I shoulda — but there I was, advised by two big law firms. I thought, They say he can’t win. They’re lawyers. They must be right. But that one paragraph allowed the courts to rescind everything that was written on the other eighteen pages.

I could tell you horror stories about attorneys, but those bastards were the worst in the world. At the

hearing, I discovered a few things I didn't know before. We had our attorneys, who I will refer to as the primary attorneys. I also consulted with the second set of attorneys. I'll call them our secondary attorneys. The secondary attorneys showed up at the preliminary hearing, even though the primary attorneys were representing me. I asked them, "Why are you guys here? You're not my attorneys in this case. My attorneys are already here."

They said, "Well, we're the attorneys for your attorneys."

I couldn't believe it. You could have knocked me over with a feather. The long and short of it is, they screwed me. The other part of it being, had I been a little more attentive to my job, so to speak, I should never have let those attorneys put me into a position which I was quite certain was doomed to failure. When I got advice from the second firm of attorneys, I thought things would turn out all right, until I learned that they were the attorneys for the

first bunch of attorneys. What are the odds of that? Atlanta is a city overrun with attorneys — and I go to the people who are the attorneys for the attorneys?

To add insult to injury, the attorneys wanted to argue it. "We haven't lost yet, Ole. The judge is wrong. We'll appeal his decision." I was so mad. It wasn't until the judge rendered his decision that it really dawned on me that we were finished. When I finally came to the realization that it was a hopeless cause, I turned to my attorneys and let them have it with both barrels. "It's too late now, you dumb bastards."

When I expressed those feelings out loud, feelings of being totally frustrated, discouraged and upset, my attorneys huddled together and held a quick conference. They walked over and told me, "We have to inform you that we will no longer be able to represent you. It seems like we have some conflict." That was an understatement. "We think you feel as though you may have reason to take

action against us. Because of that, we will no longer be able to represent you in any further proceedings."

And a Merry Christmas to you, too.

Chapter 38
Clash of the Titans

Vince McMahon made several trips to Atlanta before the final court ruling. The first time, he showed up at our TV taping with Gorilla Monsoon — Gino Marella. Gino was doing his best to smooth things out. I told Monsoon, "Listen, Gino. I don't hold any hard feelings toward you, but I don't want that asshole anywhere near me." Let me tell you, if anybody looked like they were ready to take on the world, it must have been me. Gino had an excellent background as an amateur wrestler, but as mad as I was, I was ready to take him and anyone else on. Danny Hodge might have had a hard time with me. I was ready to fight everybody and anybody.

McMahon said, "Listen to me, Ole. It's just business. I will make you more money than you ever dreamed of making."

"Go fuck yourself," I replied.

Gorilla just said, "Hey, come on, Ole." I liked Gino, but I didn't care what anyone thought.

McMahon came down one or two more times. The first time was when Jack and Jerry were doing depositions. Once again, he approached me. "Ole, it's just business. You come work for me ..." Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

I repeated my earlier comment.

The fact that Vince offered me a job was a smart thing for Vince to do. I can't say I wasn't tempted to take his offer, but I had such a low opinion of Vince McMahon. I was so mad about everything that happened leading up to the takeover. In retrospect, it probably wasn't the smart thing for me to do. Looking back on it now, he was probably sincere about what he said. With all that had been said back and forth between us, it was an

honorable gesture for him to make. I questioned it for many years after that, but I think he probably did mean it. I would have had to go along with some ideas that I wasn't too happy about, but I could have lived with it.

Years later, I thought, Jeez, if I had known those guys were gonna make the money they're making ... You see, I had no idea that McMahon was going to spend the kind of money he did to build his business. I had no idea. I thought things were going to be like they always had been. If you draw a house, you get a piece of the house. If the house doesn't do well, you get your notice and a boot in the ass. I thought it would be business as usual. How could I possibly have imagined that Vince was going to pay his talent hundreds of thousands of dollars — and not expect them to do anything other than show up ten or eleven times a month and go through the motions? I couldn't imagine that scenario. I thought we would still get $35 payoffs, $50 payoffs. If you were on top and didn't draw a house, you wouldn't be on top

anymore, and pretty soon, you wouldn't be anywhere anymore. I never dreamed they would be handing out guaranteed contracts that weren't based on performance. I couldn't imagine it. Who in their right mind would have even dreamed that would happen?

Looking back on it all, I should have said, "Vince, make me all the money that you can make me!", instead of fighting it all by myself. But I believed in the business to such an extent that I thought it blasphemy to do the things that Vince was doing.

The next time Vince came to Atlanta for depositions, he brought his wife with him. He walked over and said, "Ole, I'd like you to meet my wife, Linda." By this time, we were really in the heat of the legal battle. I had been raped so badly by those attorneys. I was so mad about everything. As I've always been a man of few words, I said, "Fuck you," to her, then turned and said, "Fuck you," to Vince.

That was when Vince said, "You'll never, ever work again."

Of course, Vince was more right than I was. I never worked in what I'd call any big capacity again.

A few weeks later, Ralph, Fred, Gene and I decided to try to get Vince to buy us out. I wanted $10,000 a point, which is what I paid for my stock. I talked to Vince and told him that if he didn't buy us out, I would make his life absolutely miserable. I would attend every board meeting he called and cause as much disruption as I could.

I paid $10,000 a point when I bought the stock in Georgia Championship Wrestling, so people ask me why I didn't hold Vince up for more money, rather than settling for a break-even proposition. The truth is, I was afraid I couldn't hold him up for anything. All Vince had to do was terminate Georgia Championship Wrestling and there wouldn't be any money coming in. If

Georgia Championship Wrestling didn't exist, what would I get for my points then? In addition, if Vince is running the television and house shows, and he doesn't book you, what are you going to make? Nothing! You have ten points of nothing and you're not being booked. He could tell you, "I'm taking over Georgia Championship Wrestling. I'll make the TV. You can go home." What are your points worth then? Nothing!

When Vince wanted to know if I would take a check, I farted at it. "Pfffft! I don't want your check. I'll take a cashier's check or a bank money order."

Vince looked surprised. "Won't you take my personal check?"

"No, I don't trust you."

A month or so after the judge interpreted the Buy-Sell agreement, both parties spent the entire day in an attorneys' office trying to reach an agreement on

the buy-out. We had new attorneys by then, but their only function was to record the deal. The meeting began at nine o'clock in the morning. At nine, nine-thirty that night, we still hadn't finalized the deal. It was going back and forth, back and forth. For awhile, I didn't think we were going to find common ground, but we finally signed all the paperwork around ten o'clock that night.

When the whole deal was completed, Vince shook hands with everybody there — Fred Ward, Ralph Freed, the attorneys. The attorneys were shaking hands because they made a few bucks. Everybody was shaking hands with everybody. I didn't appreciate the gesture at the time, but I have to admit that Vince was a gentleman through the entire process. Vince walked over one more time, held out his hand, and said, "Ole, it's just business." For the final time, in front of all the attorneys and everybody else, I told him, "Go fuck yourself." That was it.

Before I left, I told Jack and Jerry, "If I hadn't

been forced to work against everybody, including you two guys, we could have made some money." That was how it all ended. I didn't talk to people about the Briscos after that. I kept it to myself. Ralph and I talked about them when we got together, but my only comment was that they were "no-good bastards." The only reason I said that was because, as far as I was concerned, they were no-good bastards.

After everything was settled, I called Jerry and said, "Jerry, now that you've screwed everything up, we have a choice. We still have approximately $200,000 in the account. We can let Vince take control of it, or I can disperse it as a special dividend payment." Jerry held 10 percent, so he was looking at a dividend of $20,000 or so. Jack would get a similar payment. I wiped out the entire account and wrote the dividend checks to the stockholders. Vince never said anything, so he must not have cared.

I ran into the Briscos again after everything was

finalized. They picked up right where they left off. They wouldn't let it go. "Ole, we had to do what we did. You wanted all the money for yourself and wouldn't let us have any. You were making all kinds of money and ran the business without letting us help." If you weren't looking right at them, you would think you were listening to two 5-year-old kids. A few years later, I talked to some of the guys who went to New York. Jerry was working for Vince at that time. "Be sure to tell Jerry — considering the fact that Jimmy Crockett sold his business, which was dead at the time, to Ted Turner for a reported $9 million in 1998, wouldn't that have been better than the $600,000 or $700,000 that you and Jack got from Vince?"

Stupid, no-good bastards.

Chapter 39
Starting from Scratch

When McMahon took over the time slots on TBS, I heard that part of his agreement with Ted Turner was that he would tape a live show at the TBS studios. I don't know if that was part of the contract, but if it was, Vince reneged on the deal. He bicycled his tapes that were produced in New York, or wherever their production facilities were located, to Atlanta. He would send guys to Atlanta to do interviews now and then, but he wasn't producing a live show in Atlanta. The rumor was that Turner was upset, especially when the ratings went south.

I got my money from McMahon on a Wednesday. I don't think Vince would leave a loophole like that today, but he never asked me to sign a no-compete. He thought we were out for good. On Thursday, the following day, Ann

Gunkel took me to see Ted Turner. Ralph Freed and I were back on the air with our new promotion, World Championship Wrestling, on the following Saturday.

When I first began to put the package together, I was going to call it World Class Wrestling. At the time, I had forgotten that Fritz von Erich was promoting a group called World Class Wrestling out of Dallas, Texas. He heard about it and immediately called, threatening to sue me. "For what?" I asked.

"My promotion is called World Class Wrestling," Fritz explained.

"Okay, fine. I'll change it. I'll call it World Championship Wrestling. How's that?"

"Okay."

Then Joe Blanchard threatened to sue me. Joe was another former wrestler who was promoting in San Antonio. For some reason, he had a blanket

lawsuit out on several people. When I called him about it, he said, "I'm sorry. The lawyers weren't supposed to include you in that." Shortly after that, his attorney sent me a letter stating that I had been removed from the lawsuit.

Our deal with Ted Turner was the same one we had before Vince took over. We would tape a 60-minute TV show and do some interviews. The problem we had, though, was that it was a spur-of-the-moment deal, so the best time-slot we could get for the show on TBS was seven o'clock on Saturday morning. Vince had his show on TBS from five to seven o'clock in the afternoon, in addition to the Sunday afternoon slot, so Turner just worked us into the schedule. However, we weren't taping the show at the TBS studios. Ralph made arrangements to tape our show on Saturday morning at a TV studio in Macon that we had been doing business with for years. In addition to airing it on WTBS, we also bicycled the tape to Columbus and other parts of Ohio, Baltimore, and Maryland.

The fact that we were able to put a tape on TBS was all due to the efforts and influence of Ann Gunkel. She marched right into Ted's office and said, "Ole needs a TV." Later on, I was told that Ted thought Ann was part of the ownership. Ann Gunkel was one of a kind. Ann told people anything she thought they wanted to hear. And sometimes, she said things you didn't want to hear. In my opinion, Ann Gunkel, Vince McMahon, and Jim Barnett have a lot in common. I am grateful to Ann, though, because she helped me with Ted on a couple of occasions. For that, I have to say thanks.

Of course, she cashed in her chips with me a few weeks later. Right after the deal with Ted was finalized, she called and asked for a favor. "Ole, I hate to ask you this."

I had an idea of what was coming, so I took the bait. "What do you need, Ann?"

"Well, I'm really in a lot of trouble. I need some

cash."

"How much do you need, Ann?"

"I need $5,000 right away to take care of my bills and to put some groceries in the house." She went on to say, "Next month, I'll get my check and I can pay you back." At that time, she supposedly had claim to 40 acres in Gwinnett County that her husband, Ray Gunkel, had bought years before. The property was now worth more than $1 million.

What was I going to do? Ann helped me when I needed help and got me back on TV with a minimum of notice. I gave her the $5,000. That same weekend, I got a phone call from Ann. I heard a lot of noise in the background. "Where are you, Ann?" I asked.

"Oh, I'm down in Hilton Head," she said. "I just had to get away for a few days."

When I told the story to Ralph, he laughed at

me. "You actually gave her the $5,000?"

I said, "Yeah, what the hell."

I never got my money back. She died of cancer a few years after that.

So now we were running World Championship Wrestling. Ralph, Fred and I were the sole owners of the new company. We were still running the towns in West Virginia and Ohio, but we were really in dire straits in a short period of time. We used our own money for startup capital, throwing in whatever was necessary to cover the costs of reserving the arenas. After that, we relied on the shows to bring in enough funds to keep our business afloat, but we were really stretched to the limit. It was a slippery slope and things eventually went to hell in a handbasket. One by one, the wrestlers all began to desert me. Everybody was getting an ultimatum from Vince — "I'll give you a chance to come to work for me. If you want the job, you have to report for work tomorrow." I also

heard that he gave some people an option — "You can show up next month, but you don't work for Ole after today."

Vince began making calls to all of the boys — Nikolai Volkoff, Les Thornton, and Don Jardine were three of them. We were all at the airport, having just returned from Columbus, Ohio. We were going to jump in our cars and head to Macon for a TV taping. I had heard a rumor that they were going to work for Vince, so I confronted them. "Just tell me the truth. If you're gonna go, fine! I just want to know because I have a couple of hours. If I get started now, I can get some bodies down to Macon."

"Oh, no, no, no, no! We're not gonna leave you. We're not goin' to Vince. We'll be there."

A few hours later, I stood right over Don Jardine in the dressing room at television and asked, "Are you going to work for Vince McMahon?"

"No," he answered.

"If you are, I want to know right now."

"No, I'm not going."

Well, he didn't go then, but he went a week or two later.

Nikolai Volkoff and Les Thornton left the airport that afternoon and I never saw them again.

I take that back. I saw them on WWF television.

Not too long after that, I asked Ted DiBiase, "Ted, do you have any plans to jump to McMahon?"

"No, I'm staying here with you," he assured me. A week later, he told me, "I need to go home to my wife and family." He took a shortcut. He left Atlanta and made a stopover in New York on his way home to Mississippi.

With talent deserting at a fast clip, I hooked up with Jerry Jarrett, who was promoting the Memphis, Tennessee territory. We traded talent and Jimmy Hart came to work for me. Hart stiffed me in Cleveland and didn't show up. He went to work for Vince.

Vince took everybody I had. I was using guys like Jim Starr, who was working as 666 in Kansas City. I had Ron Ritchie and the Italian Stallion. Those were my main event people. They were nice-enough guys, but they weren't the kind of talent you drew money with on a national level. We were scraping the bottom of the barrel, trying to keep a handle on a ragtag bunch of guys who were disappearing on a regular basis because McMahon was making them promises. We were barely making enough money to stay alive.

In retrospect, the guys were smart to do what they did. I have to look back and admit that I was the dummy. The way things were going at the time, they weren't going to make money with me. They

were going to make money with Vince. There was no doubt about it. I couldn't fault them for that.

I fault them only for this: They should have said, "Yeah, we're gonna go work for Vince McMahon. You can't compete against him. If you think you can, you're dreaming a dream. He's gonna make us a lot more money than you'll ever make us. Not only that, but I hate working for you. You don't know anything about the wrestling business. I think you're a no-good bastard and I want you to hear from my own mouth that we're leaving and going to work for Vince McMahon."

Not one of them was man enough to be honest with me. Not one of them. None of them! And that's the part that really burned my butt. I've never understood people like that. You can call me anything you want. You can kill me. You can hang me with a rope. And if you ask me what I'm thinking, I'll tell you. It might sound like I'm putting myself over, and I suppose I have to at times because nobody else will, but if there's one

guy who is a kindred spirit to Verne Gagne, Lou Thesz, or Danny Hodge, I would be the guy. I can't imagine that anyone was more protective of the business than I was. The proof of that is that I could have been working for Vince McMahon, but I was so totally against McMahon's ideas and direction, and so determined that we had to protect the business, that I lost my place in it. If you can find another person who was more of a standup guy than I was, I don't know who it would be. If I didn't like someone and I thought they were screwing around with me, I confronted them. If I didn't like someone, I didn't pussyfoot around. In fact, that was one thing about me that people could always count on. You could talk to me. If I didn't like you, I wouldn't say, "I think you're a jolly good fellow." I would say, "You're a horse's ass and I don't like you." As I said before, that had nothing to do with how I felt about you as a wrestler. If you were someone who did what you were asked to do, and did it well, then you knew it because you drew money. That was a clear indication that you were doing your job

well. How else would you determine if someone was doing his job well? I didn't think Buzz Sawyer was a good worker just because I liked the way he laced up his boots in the dressing room. I thought he was a good worker because people wanted to see him wrestle, and they were willing to pay to do that. On top of that, I liked the guy. But if he didn't draw a dime, do you think I would have let him hang around for more than five minutes?

So no matter how much I liked or disliked someone, my using them in the business had nothing to do with whether or not I liked them personally. It's funny when I think about it, though, because we've come right back to the statement that Vince made to me. "It's just business." I used that phrase all of my life, but when Vince used it on me, I was too mad to see it. I wasn't able to make that stretch. I didn't quite understand what business was when it applied to me, but when I was applying it to everyone else, it was just business. I thought I was protecting the business

for everybody, so I told him, "Go fuck yourself," and yet, virtually everybody else was trying to figure out how to sell out. Name anyone! Just about everyone was ready to sell out because the guys stood to make a lot of money by going to work for Vince. That's understandable. I could have sold out to Vince right then and there — but I wouldn't do it, wouldn't do it, wouldn't do it. I should have done what everybody else did and said, "Vince! Buy this thing. I'm selling it. If you want, I'll run it for you. I'll work for you. I'll do whatever you want. I'll even shut up and listen."

Wait a minute now. I'm getting carried away. I could never shut up for anybody no matter how much they paid me.

I'm sure, eventually, that Vince and I would have gotten sideways, but I wasn't going to do it. Even if I had been abIe to see what was going to happen, I wasn't going to do it with Vince. To me, Vince was not the kind of a guy that I wanted to see in the wrestling business. That's plain and simple. He

was never a wrestler. He was never a worker, or a performer, or whatever anybody wants to call it. I was never crazy about his father, either. The impression many of the promoters got from Vince Sr. was that he looked at himself as the aristocracy of wrestling. He was the blue blood, the royal line of wrestling. That's an oxymoron if ever there was one. So I had no time for him. I had all the time in the world for Verne Gagne. I had all the time for Lou Thesz, Danny Hodge, and Johnny Valentine. They had all been down the road together. The idea of making a lot of money with Vince was appealing, and very much so, but you couldn't get me to go to work for Vince McMahon — Junior or Senior. Of course, years later, I would run across some of his guys and I would say, "Listen, I want you to take a message back to Vince." They would look at me like I was poison. "Just tell him this. 'I'm sorry, Vince. Boo-hoo-hoo! I don't know what I was thinking. Wahhhh! I don't know what came over me.'" I would cry and make a big production of it. We would all have a big laugh over it.

I called Jim [J.J.] Dillon one day in the early '90s when Jim was working for Vince. I said, "Jim, I'm looking for a job. I can help you with the booking or with the wrestlers." He said, "I'll tell Vince and get right back to you." I never heard from them. I can't imagine why.

We continued to promote through 1985, but eventually, we had to pack it up. That was when Jimmy Crockett came down to present a deal to buy the promotion from me, Fred and Ralph. Actually, the ones who were going to do the buying were Elliott Murnick and his brother, Carl. Elliott used to promote Raleigh, Norfolk, Richmond, and some other towns for Crockett. Jimmy was going to run Atlanta, while Murnick would run the Ohio, Michigan, and West Virginia area. I don't know how many payments Ralph and Fred got, but Murnick paid me for a few months before the payments came to a halt. Things were getting tough for everybody by that time and it was all a verbal agreement. Dusty was booking in such a way that there was little possibility of

Jimmy making any money. Even if they sold out every building, which was unlikely, they were still spending more money than they would be taking in. Crockett's promotion was a haphazard operation of the first order. Ralph has been mad at Crockett and Murnick ever since. If you mention it to him now, the only comment he'll make is, "Fuck those guys!"

Chapter 40
Skyrocketing Expenses

I worked for Jimmy Crockett after he supposedly bought us out, but it was on an irregular basis. I would work shots for him in places like Baltimore and Philadelphia, and then I would take time off. I didn't have any input on anything from 1985 through 1987. I was strictly working. I was just trying to do what I was told, but I didn't like it, and I know I had to be a pain in the ass.

When I was running the company, our expenses would run somewhere around $100 per person for the plane tickets. We could fly fifteen guys to Columbus, Ohio, for $1,500 a week. I would rent cars at 50 bucks a week and put four to a car. That was another $200. Everybody paid for their own hotels. We ran the whole operation for less than $2,000 a week and whatever our rents for the buildings were.

When Jimmy took control of the territory, Dusty Rhodes came up with a whole new format of doing business. Dusty would book 25 people on a card, which is exactly what he did in Florida. There was no reason whatsoever to use that many guys. We never did — and we still did good business.

They also didn't give any thought to booking the towns in such a way that the wrestlers could stay over on a Saturday, which would have allowed them to get cheaper airline tickets. They just bought the tickets without giving any thought to discounts. In addition to that, they didn't work the territory the way we did. We had a loop worked out that we followed. Granted, that loop looked like a jigsaw puzzle at times, especially when we went into Michigan. You couldn't always make a nice loop out of it because of the availability of the towns, but we did our best to book towns in sequence.

As an example, Dusty didn't book the same 25

people in all of the towns. After a show in Columbus, he would fly 16 of them to St. Petersburg, Florida. The other nine would drive to Canton and meet up with 16 other people that Dusty flew in for that show. Again, instead of using the same 25 people in Toledo on the following night, he would fly 15 of them to Kansas City and keep the other ten to work in Toledo. The next day, 15 more people would fly into Columbus and they would all drive to Toledo.

The expenses just skyrocketed. Where our expenses were less than $2,000, their expenses increased tremendously. Crockett had his own private planes flying in because Dusty wouldn't fly on a commercial flight. A couple of the wrestlers told me that when Jimmy flew out to Vegas for our annual wrestling meetings, he also flew some of the boys to the Mustang Ranch for a couple of days. The Mustang Ranch was a legal whorehouse in Nevada. I wasn't there to see the ranch because I never went to it, but I'm sure the guys who did go had a good time. Everyone would stay overnight,

and then they might fly to Phoenix, or wherever, the next day for a show. After the show, they would fly back to Vegas. The next day, they might fly to San Francisco, and then fly back to Vegas. It was crazy. Jimmy was spending money like it had no end. Of course, he also had to give Dusty a gift of a Mercedes. It was either a 560 or 460 SL, a tiny, two-door model that Dusty could barely squeeze into. Everything was for Dusty. Crockett even named his private jet "Stardust." Dusty talked him into all kinds of nonsense.

It was foolish and wasteful. I tried to explain that to anybody who would listen, but of course, Dusty was running the business. Jimmy was so enamored with Dusty and certain that Dusty could do no wrong that, to my knowledge, he never questioned him. They weren't drawing more money than we were when I was booking, but their expenses had increased big-time. The only reason they drew more money later is because they raised the ticket prices. They had a few good houses, but they weren't as good on a consistent basis as they were

before. They never sold out Cleveland or any of the other towns on a regular basis. They didn't even sell out Columbus, which we used to do pretty regularly.

In my opinion, Dusty had some good ideas, but they were just basic ideas. For instance, he was good at coming up with names for the events. He came up with the idea for Starrcade and Bash at the Beach. I thought they were good ideas, but I don't think the events themselves actually had anything to do with drawing money. To me, it's like me building the car, putting the tires on it, dropping the engine into it, and doing everything necessary to get that car in running condition. When I'm finished, Dusty walks up and puts a pennant on the radio antenna, and then takes credit for the entire operation. I thought building the car was the most important factor in the overall picture, but Dusty took credit for the whole thing and Crockett fell for it.

Of course, within three years, Jim Crockett

Promotions was on the verge of bankruptcy and Turner Broadcasting System, Inc. bought the company for a reported $9 million.

When it came down to the actual booking, Dusty was much better than Kevin Sullivan or Ric Flair, but not much. The worst characteristic of his booking was the number of run-ins he used. They were a dime a dozen. I didn't believe in that. The run-in finish is something that should be used sparingly, if ever. You can get by with it once in awhile, but not every night — and not even every month. It was my opinion that you had to give the people a finish. Someone had to win and someone had to lose. Dusty was guilty of doing the same thing that George Scott did when he was booking for Jim Crockett Sr. They would have a "no disqualification, no countout" match, and then somebody would get tied up in the ropes and the match would end with no conclusion. That's ridiculous! If you can't disqualify or count someone out, there's only one thing you can do. Somebody has to beat somebody!

The wrestlers all used the argument that a pin in the middle of the ring would kill their value in the eyes of the fans. The wrestlers today still worry about doing jobs. When Gene and I were together, we let people beat us all the time. The guys thought, "Boy, that's incredible. The Andersons did the job for us." We did — but I'll guarantee you one thing — even though the other guys got their hands raised, Gene and I both looked like King Kong when the match was over. We would do the job in such a way that the people would say, "Those guys didn't have a chance. It was a fluke that they won."

After the match, the audience was telling them, "You'd better hope you never have to wrestle the Andersons again. They'll kill you."

In direct contradiction to the statement that I just made, oddly enough, the fact is that a majority of the times I got stabbed was after we had gotten beat. So even though it sounds contradictory, and it is, I believe that some of the fans thought that

once we had been beat, or since we had taken so much punishment, that even they would have a chance to do something with us. I used to tell Flair, "When people are all wound up and are after your hide, there are two reasons behind it. Either you really have heat ... or they think they can kick your ass."

I never bought into the theory that you saved anybody by having a no-decision for a match. The only time we got close to that, and we were doing something entirely different, was when Gene and I were working with Number One and Number Two in tag team matches, or Wahoo McDaniel and Paul Jones. We built our program on the idea that one hour wasn't enough time, so we would return the following week in a 90-minute match. The people all knew the match was going to be over long before the time limit was up. They were stunned when we went the full 90 minutes. That alone built the credibility of what we were doing. The people were saying, "That other stuff might be fake, but jeez! Nobody in their right mind would stay out

there for 90 minutes." And it wasn't just being out there for an hour-and-a-half. That's what Ric Flair never understood. I'll elaborate on that thought later, but we had matches that kept the people on the edge of their seats, or standing up, and the proof of that was that we did big business!

Do you think George Scott would have booked us for the whole summer of 1975 if we were bombing out and nobody was showing up? We were doing continuous sellout business. When we were in Greenville, we might not have had a sellout every week, but the worst house we had was 5,000 people plus. For anyone to do that week-in and week-out was really something. So once again, to be able to draw the people back one more time and then go two hours — and go the time limit again — the people were just looking for a climax to it all! We did what you might consider to be non-finishes, but we didn't work disqualifications and countouts ad nauseam.

Dusty really thought that he understood the

business. He still thinks he understands the business, although he's learning that his ideas aren't working so well anymore. Don't get me wrong. I don't hold anything against Dusty. I like Dusty. He had some good ideas, but he also had many ideas that were absolute nonsense. One time, Dusty came up with an angle involving my son, who was an amateur wrestler in high school and in college. This was back in the mid-'80s, when Crockett was running the territory. Dusty laid out the whole scenario —

Several wrestlers would beat the hell out of me and leave me lying in the ring. My son, who was watching at ringside, leaps to his feet and runs to the dressing room. When he comes back out, who does he have with him?

Dusty Rhodes.

While I'm lying there, Dusty comes into the ring, kicks the hell out of everybody, and saves my life. He then kneels down and cradles me in his

arms as my son climbs into the ring.

The next day, my son would make an interview on TV. The interview was basically something along the lines of my son saying, "You know, Dusty. I watched you and my dad wrestle each other for years. Those were some of the toughest wrestling matches I've ever seen. I knew you two hated each other, but when I saw those guys beating up my dad, I knew there was only one guy who could help us — only one guy. I was afraid that you'd turn me down, but I knew there was only one guy who could save my father from death or worse — and that's why I asked you to come out, Dusty. All of my life, I always loved my father and thought he was a great wrestler, but I always considered myself to be your number one fan, Dusty. I could never tell my dad that, but I really respected you."

I finally had to butt in and interrupt Dusty. "That's a great idea, Dusty," I gushed. "Do you want me to add to it?"

"Yeah, yeah."

"Why stop there? Why don't you really pull a surprise on everybody and tell them you screwed my wife eighteen years ago, then announce to my son that you're really his dad."

The minute those words left my mouth, I felt a cold chill run down my spine. The idea ran through my head that Dusty might actually think it was a good idea. Fortunately, we didn't go through with any of it. Dusty just glared at me.

Dusty was a star when he was in Atlanta. When I was booking the territory from 1976 to 1980, we had sellout after sellout after sellout with Dusty on top. But was he entirely responsible for it? No! Could he do it by himself? No. Could we have done it without Dusty? Yes. We had already done it with Number One and Number Two. Could we have done it better without Dusty. Possibly. But Dusty couldn't do it without having someone to program him.

Dusty did tell me something that I didn't believe at the time, but he was right on the money. He said, "You know, I think there's gonna come a day when all we're gonna do is announce that the wrestlers are gonna be here, and we'll fill the house up. They'll be big stars. It'll be like Elvis Presley. Just announce wrestling and the building will fill up." I thought Dusty was nuttier than a squirrel turd when he told me that, but they actually reached that level for a period of time. To a certain degree, that did happen. Unfortunately, just being a celebrity wasn't enough to draw a house for an extended period of time.

While I worked for Crockett, I didn't stop complaining. I really was a pouting brat during that time. That's how I would describe myself because I was so mad about the way things were going. I would look at the shows and realize just how screwed up everything was. Dusty would say, "What's the matter?" I would start to say something, but then I would just grumble, "Ah, nothin'." I would go sit in the corner and sulk. I

realized that it wouldn’t do any good to say anything.

In 1988, just before Turner bought the company from Jimmy, I talked to David Crockett. I told him, "David, you guys had better get a handle on expenses or your company is going into the toilet."

David Crockett just hung his head and said, "It’s already too late. It’s too late."

As I walked out ten minutes later, I met Dusty on his way in. "How are things going, Dusty?"

"Just shooper, shooper. Everything’s great!"

Either he didn’t know, or he didn’t want to know — or he didn’t care.

Chapter 41
Shooperman

In November 1988, Ted Turner bought Jim Crockett's wrestling promotion and called it World Championship Wrestling. Sound familiar? Unfortunately, Ted's people didn't learn from Crockett's example. They put people in charge of the company who knew nothing about wrestling. They spent money like it was going out of style. The result? Twelve years later, Turner's WCW also went out of business. This time, it wasn't because of Dusty, but it was due to them adopting the Dusty mindset ... only doing it even better. Why spend a little, when you can spend a lot?

In 1989, Turner's people hired me to be a road agent. That was when Jim Cornette, Kevin Sullivan and Ric Flair were booking the territory as a committee. What a fiasco that turned out to

be. The three of them just blundered their way through. They asked me if I would like to help book, so with me on the team, there were four people booking. At first, I didn't offer any input because they were so sure they knew what they were doing. There was hardly any way you could say, "Hey, this is the shits! This stinks! This isn't gonna work!" Those three weren't even good at throwing names together, and basically, that was what they thought booking was.

Cornette thought he knew a lot about the business, but here's a good example of what he thought made interesting television. When we bought Chattanooga in the early '80s and incorporated it into the Georgia territory, we taped a television show in Chattanooga. One Saturday, while I was out of town, I left Cornette in charge of his own match. He came up with a novel idea. He threw a birthday party for his dog. One of Cornette's wrestlers was Frank Morrell, an ugly, scarred-up wrestler who had been around for a long time. Both he and his partner, Jerry Novak, were

dressed up in party hats and blowing party favors — and they were heels! Even the dog was wearing a party hat. Later that day, when Ronnie West told me about it, I felt like crawling under a rock. I called Cornette and yelled at him. "What's the matter with you? What in the hell were you thinking?" I fired Cornette.

I tried to work with the committee, but it was too difficult. One example I can give you off the top of my head was an angle they wanted to do pitting the Road Warriors against Rick and Scott Steiner. It was going to be one of their premiere signature matches that would sell out every arena. I warned them from the very first mention of it. "It ain't gonna work! It will never work. If you put those two teams together, it's gonna kill both of them dead."

Of course, they thought I was nuts. Their comeback was, "Well, on paper it looks great."

"It might look great on paper," I said, "but the fact

is, there won't be any working going on in the ring. The Steiners can and will stretch the Road Warriors."

I knew the match was going to be bad. I knew the match was going to be the shits. But Moe, Larry and Curly looked at it on paper and said, "This is really going to be great."

The match was booked for TV in a town in Missouri. Within seconds of the two teams getting into the ring, the Steiners took the Road Warriors off their feet and rode them like they were riding donkeys, even to the extent of slapping them on the ass. I knew it would happen. I knew it, but no one else could foresee anything like that actually happening.

Everyone thought all hell would break loose when the two teams got back to the dressing room, but nothing happened. The Steiners had already made their point, so they didn't have anything else to prove, and the Road Warriors knew better than

to press the issue. If the Road Warriors were going to do something, they would have done it in the ring — but they couldn't.

That was definitely a shoot. I knew things would turn out the way they did from the first mention of it. The Road Warriors thought they were fairly tough kids, and they were, but they were no match for the Steiners. The Steiners were legitimate shooters. Scott Steiner was really good and looked like a million dollars, but Rick was better than Scott. Rick would take Scott apart. But Rick and Scott didn't have enough time in the business to realize that they were going to make barrels of money if they treated the match as though they were the nice guys who didn't resort to cheating, or the nice guys who didn't resort to finger breaking, and just let the Road Warriors do their thing. They didn't know how to do that. They weren't experienced enough yet. In their minds, they couldn't allow themselves to be less than the Road Warriors. They couldn't put themselves in a position where the Road Warriors were going to

look stronger. They felt like they had to put the Road Warriors in their place. Even if Rick and Scott were willing to do a job, they would feel better about it if they first let the Road Warriors know that they could kick their butts if they wanted.

The Steiners weren't smart enough to realize the problems they had caused for the business, either. They thought it was kind of cute that they were riding the Road Warriors. In fact, they thought it was hilarious. But, of course, it was devastating to the Road Warriors. The people in the audience thought it was some kind of a work because the Road Warriors had been built to look like supermen. In real life, you can't put the two teams together because the supermen aren't going to beat the Steiners no matter how tough they might have been. But the people didn't understand that. They looked at the Road Warriors as two superhuman people who could stop tanks and jump off high buildings. The Road Warriors had been built up to a point where nobody could beat them. The people had to be thinking, How much

did the Road Warriors get paid to let the Steiners ride them and treat them like that? Or, The only way the Steiners could do that to the Road Warriors is if the promoters told the Road Warriors to let them do it. Or, or, or. None of the possibilities were good for business. The Steiners weren't smart enough to know that. It killed the Road Warriors dead in that town. And, of course, at that point, the Steiners just fizzled.

A babyface team with the knowledge of how the business worked would have said, "We'll be White Knights fighting for truth and virtue, but when the timing calls for it, the Road Warriors will be like King Kong and Godzilla, and we'll go into a selling mode." The Steiners could prove how good they were any time they wanted. All they had to do was shoot and they could make the Road Warriors look like a couple of dummies. Instead, the Steiners sent a message, not only to the Road Warriors, but to the people: The Road Warriors don't have a snowball's chance in hell tonight. If the Steiners didn't want to do the

job, they weren't going to do the job. And if the Steiners were going to lose, the Steiners were going to make sure the people knew they were doing a job. They couldn't be beat in a shoot.

Mr. Wrestling #2, Johnny Walker, found himself in the same situation. When John was headed over to Ireland on vacation, Ronnie West told me about a guy named Joe Powell, who looked just like Number Two when he had his ring gear on. I didn't believe him, but when Joe Powell walked over, I could have sworn I was looking at Two. I asked, "Can you work like him?"

"Sure," he said.

We put him in the ring and he fooled me. He worked just like Two. If he fooled me, he could fool the fans.

After Joe wrestled for the first time as Number Two, Gordon Solie really put him over as Number Two. Gordon invited him over for an interview,

but Joe immediately left the studio. The following week, Joe again wrestled as Number Two. He got his hand raised and walked off camera.

Barnett always watched the TV shows. We met a few days after Joe Powell's first match as Number Two. Barnett said, "We've seen Number Two so much. Can't we do something else with him? How about keeping him off TV for awhile. We need to send him somewhere."

I said, "Jim, that wasn't Number Two."

"Oh, I know Number Two," he insisted. "I've been watching him forever."

"Jim, that wasn't Number Two."

He would not believe me. "Oh, Ole. I saw him this morning. It was that same old, tired Number Two."

When I finally convinced him, he was stunned. "Oh, that's very interesting," he

said. That was always Barnett's response. His first reaction to something was that it wasn't worthwhile, and then he would tumble to what was going on and he would say, "Oh, that might draw."

The following week, the real Number Two returned from vacation, so we had him come onto the set and talk to Gordon at the end of the show. Gordon said, "You really looked good last week."

Number Two said, "What?"

Gordon said, "Well, last week I tried to get you over here, but it looked like you were in a hurry to leave. The fans were a little disappointed that I didn't get to talk to you."

Number Two said, "I wasn't here last week."

Gordon just looked at him and said, "Huh?"

That was all that was said. The show ended. The following week, we brought Joe

Powell back again for another match as Number Two, only this time, the real Number Two showed up before the imposter finished wrestling. They both stared at each other. Gordon wasn't quite sure what to do. The two guys had the same body, the same trunks, the same mask, the same look. Gordon now understood why Number Two made the comment about not being there, but a new question arose. Which one was the real Number Two? Was it the one in the ring, or the one on the ground? We didn't beat the idea to death. It got over like a million dollars.

We had a series of matches booked over several weeks for the two, which would culminate in a "Mask vs. Mask" match. Unfortunately, John just couldn't contain himself. In their first match, he destroyed Joe Powell so badly that I cut the program off. I killed it. John forgot that the most important thing in this business is to draw money. He thought it was more important to show everybody how tough he was, and he took advantage of a kid who didn't know any better. As

a result, the match stunk. One match — and the whole program was over. No big money. No big crowds. It was just over.

John did the same thing when I brought Charlie Tanaka in from Hawaii. I called Charlie and said, "I'd like to have you come in for a couple of weeks. I have an idea for a program with you and Number Two." He agreed to come in, so we set it up. Charlie was over because he was an impressive-looking guy, not to mention the fact that he was salty and a mean-looking SOB. If there was anybody who looked like he could take care of Number Two better than Charlie Tanaka, I don't know who it would have been.

John wasn't smart enough to realize that he could make money with Charlie. He was more worried about how he was going to look, so he refused to give Charlie anything that would make Charlie look good. Charlie was a good worker, but he wasn't smart enough to know when someone was taking advantage of him. It might also be possible

that Charlie just wanted to go along with Number Two. He wasn't savvy enough to say, "Wait a minute," and he wasn't a good enough worker to know how to work around it. We made the first go-around of the circuit, which was Augusta, Macon, Columbus [Georgia], and Albany, then I cut the program off and sent Charlie home.

Of course, when Gene and I worked with Number Two, we were able to control the match. John didn't try to eat Gene and me up like he did poor Joe Powell. First of all, John couldn't do it. Secondly, if he had been able to, after he did it two or three times, I would have fired him.

In 1983, I wanted John to leave Georgia. I wanted him to go on a retirement tour, but he was dead-set against it. He thought I was trying to screw him. I said, "John, you've been here forever. I need you to get out of the territory. I want you to announce to everybody that you've really enjoyed your stay here with Georgia Championship Wrestling, but you want to travel

and wrestle all over the world, telling your fans thank you and goodbye. We'll keep you out for four or five months, then we'll bring you back."

My plan was to book him in Oklahoma with Bill Watts. Every week, we would tell stories on TV about Mr. Wrestling #2. He was in Japan. He was on a big tour of Oklahoma, Florida, and then over to Europe. After four or five months, I would bring John back and have him sitting in the audience. He loved wrestling so much that he couldn't stay away. Gordon Solie would spot John and bring him over for an interview, making a big deal about him being there.

I had a whole scenario laid out. John would develop an interest in one of the rookies who showed potential, but who was getting beat every week, and he would take the rookie under his wing. I didn't have anybody in mind for the part, but it would be somebody that no one knew. Unfortunately, John didn't want to go for it. He thought I was just trying to get rid of him.

When I saw John last year at his get-together, I reminded him of that. He just smiled and looked at the floor. "Well, you know ..." That's just the way John was. Oddly enough, John told me that the first person he saw when he arrived in Georgia was Joe Powell. Powell drives a truck for a living and had stopped by to see John. It's too bad that things turned out as they did. They could have made a lot of money together.

Dusty Rhodes. For a time in the late '70s, you couldn't beat him. You just couldn't beat him. When it finally got to the point where you had to beat him, he didn't want to do it. As I listened to what the fans were responding to in the matches, I realized that the people had concluded that Dusty was invincible. Not that I knew 100 percent, but I was making an educated guess. I finally had to tell him, "Right now, Dusty, you're in a position where people don't think you can be beat. You're not vulnerable anymore. You're no longer human. You've taken on this new persona and the people are no longer interested in it because they

know what you're going to do. They know you can't be beaten. What we have to do is make you human again. We've got to show that you can be hurt, that you can be beaten, that you can be placed in jeopardy. At that point, I think we can go ahead and have another round with you. To set that up, you have to be beaten — and beaten badly." I planned to do it with me, Dusty, and Ivan Koloff.

We kicked the program off in Atlanta when Ivan and I took the Georgia tag team title from Jack and Jerry Brisco. In the process, we abused the referee and injured Jerry, so Number Two came down to the ring to help. That set up a return for the following week with Ivan and me against Jack Brisco and Number Two with Dusty Rhodes as the special referee.

Dusty didn't make it to the arena that night. Ivan and I supposedly beat him up in the parking lot. The show began at eight o'clock in the evening, so Ivan and I showed up during the break after the first match. We walked right through the

front door of the building. Both of us had our clothes torn and we were both bleeding. We looked like we had been in a dogfight. We walked right through the middle of the auditorium, then along the corridors to the dressing rooms. It didn't take any time at all for the people to buzz the news all through the building.

What I wanted to do was have Dusty come in during the main event, just as we were destroying Jack and Number Two. Dusty was going to stagger in, looking like he had been mugged, and save the day, so we tried to set up this elaborate system where he could come in from the parking lot. That night, Dusty crawled underneath a car, got juice, smeared grease all over himself, and then laid there waiting for the time to go. As he looked at his watch, a parking lot guard walked by and saw Dusty's foot sticking out from underneath the car. He shone his flashlight on Dusty and growled, "What the hell's going on here?"

Dusty had to crawl out and stagger away, instead

of lying there until it was time to go. As Dusty got to his feet, the guard saw the blood and went nuts. Dusty said, "Ohhh! I got beat up by Ole Anderson and Ivan Koloff," and began to stagger toward the building. The guard was watching him, so Dusty had no choice but to go into the building ahead of schedule. He tried to take his time and delay his entrance, but it was much too early. When he walked into the building, it was during intermission, a full ten minutes before the main event was scheduled to begin. Ronnie West ran to the back and said, "Dusty just walked into the building." I couldn't believe it. Intermission was just about the worst time that could have happened. I sent word up to Greg Solie, who was filming, to get whatever he could. "Film the crowd and see if you can get a shot of Dusty." Here comes Dusty, through the crowd, right down to the ring. Of course, all the house lights are on and nobody is wrestling, but Greg filmed it all. I sent some of the guys down to help Dusty get backstage. We finally had an ambulance come in to take him out of the building.

I was thinking, Now what am I going to do? The next morning, we had to be at the studio for the television taping. As soon as I got there, I asked the production people, "How did the film look?"

They gave me the bad news. "There's nothing on the film that you can use."

I said, "Let me see it." The arena was sold out, so you didn't see much on the film other than the crowd of people. You could just barely see Dusty's head above the crowd. He staggered up to the ring and collapsed onto the floor. A minute or so later, you can see some of the boys going down to help Dusty up and leading him back to the dressing room.

When the production crew said, "There's nothing we can use," I said, "Just play it like it is." That's exactly what we did. We gave the people a minute of it. Of course, Gordon Solie did a fabulous job of relating the story to the people, explaining the scenario ahead of time. "Dusty told us he got beat

up in the parking lot by Ole Anderson and Ivan Koloff. We'd like to show a few moments of film taken just after the attack. If you look really close, you can see Dusty."

The following week, our match was with Dusty and Bill Watts, so we pulled out a victory, which of course, gave us reason to bring Dusty back with Andre the Giant as his partner, looking for revenge. We built the storyline and did great business. By beating Dusty so soundly, all of a sudden, Dusty became human again. He became vulnerable. The people realized that someone could actually beat Dusty.

At one point, I brought Mad Dog Vachon in from Minneapolis as a partner for Dusty. Maurice did a great interview. We even had Bernard "Boom Boom" Geoffrion involved. Boom Boom used to play hockey for the Montreal Canadiens and was the coach for the Atlanta Flames hockey team. He did a great interview for us. He said, "I'm a hockey player, but the toughest guy in the world

ever I know is Mad Dog Vachon." We drew a super house.

Before we went out, when we were in the dressing room, Maurice asked, "Rock, what do you want me to do?"

I said, "Maurice! You're a crazy, out-of-control brawler. You go in and we'll feed you while you just beat the hell out of us. It's not going to be a wrestling match. You just be a wildman and we'll take the bumps for you."

Unfortunately, Mad Dog was already kind of crippled. His arms weren't working too well and he was having problems with his knee. That was before the wreck that took his leg off. Ivan Koloff and I stood in the ring, waiting for him to come in and demolish us. All I remember him saying when he got in the ring was, "Rock, I can't move." It was like he was frozen in stone. "Rock, I can't move." Oh, what a letdown.

We also brought George "The Animal" Steele down as Dusty's partner. I believe it was a one-week deal. George was supposed to be a crazy lunatic, so who was he going to be afraid of?

Nobody! How can he be afraid of anybody? If you have a gun, he'll eat the gun. The problem was, Dusty got to him before the match. When George came down to the ring, Ivan and I both backed up, putting him over. But instead of coming in and getting after us, he stopped outside the ring and stood there. A few seconds later, Dusty came in and cleaned house. George hadn't done the first thing. I asked him about it later that night. "What the hell were you doing? We were right there, waiting for you to come in and kick the hell out of us."

"Dusty told me ...."

I knew exactly what he was going to say. I interrupted him and said, "Don't say anything else. I understand." I had him there for that one

week. We drew a good house, then I got rid of him.

For several years, we kept knocking off Dusty's partners, but Dusty always remained. We built the storyline and just did great business. My point in telling all this is to say that Dusty had gotten so strong that nobody believed anything could happen to him. They had become bored because when he wrestled, he always won, so they knew the outcome before they went. There was no reason to go anymore. But all of a sudden, by doing that angle, Dusty became human again. He became vulnerable. The people realized that someone could beat Dusty because Ivan and I did it. The program became Dusty's vendetta against us. We kept knocking his partners off, using them as cannon fodder, but Dusty always remained. He kept searching for new partners. Everybody lies about the houses, but if I'm not mistaken, we played to sell-out houses from November until April.

Chapter 42
Corporate Duh-merica

When I began working as an agent for WCW in the fall of '89, agent being the code word for "low-paid stooge," the first person from Turner's organization that I remember meeting was Jim Herd. As far as I know, Herd had no background in wrestling. In my opinion, he knew nothing about the wrestling business. It didn't take long to confirm my opinion.

After a few months of working as an agent, I was asked to take over the book. It was funny how that all came about. In May 1990, I was asked to do interviews in Canton, Ohio. I refused to do several interviews because I was told to threaten the kids. Number one, that could get me involved in a lawsuit. Number two, threatening to beat up young kids is what we called cheap heat. I told the people conducting the interviews, "I won't do

it." Well, everyone thought I was going to be fired ... including me.

The next morning, I received a phone call at my hotel from Jim Herd's secretary. She said Jim Herd wanted to see me in Atlanta. I thought, That's it. They're going to give me my walking papers. I was surprised that she didn't tell me outright that I was fired, but she insisted that I fly back for a personal meeting with Herd. I thought that was odd, but I booked a flight and went back to Atlanta. I missed the rest of the tour.

When I sat down in front of Herd's desk, he got right down to business. "Will you be loyal to me?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Well, I want to make you the booker," he explained, "but I need your assurance that you're gonna be loyal to me."

I needed more information before making a decision. "Well, if you're asking if I'm going to do

what you tell me to do, that brings up a few questions. Are you going to make the decisions, or will I be allowed to make the decisions? If I decide to do something, are you going to overrule me? And if you make a decision, am I allowed to argue the point?"

He said, "Well, you'll make some and I'll make some."

I said, "Well, if you make a decision, and I disagree with the decision, but you insist on it, then you have to take responsibility for making that decision. If you'll do that, then we won't have any problems."

He agreed, but that turned out to be a lie. He made decisions that were so stupid. And, of course, when those decisions failed, he blamed me. He told his boss, "Well, you know I'm not the wrestling expert. Ole's the guy who knows everything about wrestling." I should have known that would happen because Herd once told me,

"Always make sure you have somebody between you and the door." In other words, keep someone close to you so you can blame them when things fall apart.

I'm being charitable when I say that Herd was an absolute idiot. He wanted me to fire Bobby Eaton one time. I asked him, "Why?"

"Well, he hasn't won a match on TV in the last three weeks," he explained.

I was thinking, You stupid son-of-a-bitch, but what I said was, "Damn, Jim! We told him to lose."

"Yeah, I know, but he hasn't won a match. Get rid of him."

I remembered something that former baseball great Yogi Berra used to say. "It's like déjá vu all over again!" It took me right back to the time when Jim Barnett told me to fire Tommy Rich. How do you deal with thinking like that?

Later on, Herd wanted me to fire Wahoo McDaniel. I refused to do it, but they fired him anyway. Wahoo always thought I instigated that action as retaliation for the swerve he pulled on me in Charlotte when Jimmy Crockett brought Dory Funk in as the booker, but I didn't have anything to do with it.

I liked Wahoo, but he pulled a few stunts on me that I didn't like. Wahoo went to work for WCW before I did. I don't know when they hired him, but I didn't get there until September or October of 1989. At the time, we were both supposed to be agents. I think we both made the same amount of money, around $60,000. It was really the pits. I remember making a comment to Herd when he gave us both raises to $75,000. Herd asked, "Well, how do you like the raise?"

"Great!" I said, putting as much enthusiasm into my voice as I could. "Now I'm making as much money as I made back in 1967 ... when I first

started wrestling."

Wahoo tried to get me into spots every now and then that would make me look bad. As a for-instance, he was booked in Alabama on a night that I was booked in Richmond. The following evening, they ran another town in Alabama. Wahoo wanted me to take that spot.

"Wahoo, I'm not going all the way to Birmingham from Richmond. You do it. You're already in Alabama."

"Okay, okay, okay."

I went to Roanoke, the town I was booked in. Instead of going to Birmingham, Wahoo went home to Charlotte. When Jim Herd asked him why he missed the shot, he said, "Ole was supposed to be there. It was on the booking sheet." Originally, I wasn't on the booking sheet. Wahoo was. I had to show them a copy of my booking sheet to prove that I wasn't booked there. Then Wahoo told Herd

that I verbally agreed to make the switch, but didn't show up. That was where Wahoo and I got sideways. Whenever I would confront him about something, he would act just like Flair did when I chewed him out. The only difference between Wahoo and Flair was, Wahoo wouldn't cry. Big tears would actually well up in Flair's eyes. When I talked to Wahoo, he would just hang his head and act like a kid who just got caught with his hand in the cookie jar.

When Herd gave me the job as booker, he paid me $250,000. That was wonderful, but what a rat's nest that company was. I had to fight every Tom, Dick and Harry in the company, all of whom were making more money than me. There was no control like there was when I had the book in the past. I thought there would be, but there wasn't. Years before, nobody disobeyed or went against anything I said. Even Mark Lewin, who was a very good friend of Barnett, couldn't overrule me. Barnett said, "Well, you know, Mark. Ole is the booker." It wasn't long before

Mark Lewin was gone. If you could get rid of Mark Lewin, you could get rid of anybody.

The year 1990 was a time when I still believed there might be a chance to make it "wrestling" again. I made an attempt to turn it back into wrestling like I remembered it, but I was dealing with kids who didn't have any idea of what that meant. How are you going to feature wrestling when nobody knows how to wrestle? For that matter, they didn't care to know anything about wrestling. They all thought it was unnecessary. How could I feature wrestling performances when nobody knew how to wrestle?

Lex Luger, one of the star performers for WCW, didn't know what the word wrestle meant. Ask Bob Roop about Luger. Bob is the person who broke the gutless wonder in. Jim Herd didn't know anything about wrestling, either. And to make matters worse, Herd was listening to Luger. Herd was listening to everybody — except the people who had actual knowledge of wrestling

gained from years of experience.

Michael Hayes and Jimmy Garvin were there. I chewed them out several times because they made mistakes and had lousy matches. Every night, I would find myself telling them, "You guys know better than that." They were trying to adopt a style. First of all, they didn't know how to work, but I'll give them credit because they made a reasonable attempt to do something. Bill Watts made money with Hayes and Garvin, but he didn't make money on their ability as workers. Watts made money on his ability to book them in such a way that what they did looked good. He programmed them with people who could make them look good. Of course, good bookers always did it that way, but Hayes and Garvin never learned to do it by themselves. They had a lot in common with the Road Warriors. The Road Warriors never learned much about working, but they were very good in the position you put them in, and they made money in that position. If you let them veer from that position by more than half a

degree, you could forget any idea of things working the way they were planned. Mike and Joe's problems began when they got the idea in their head that they really knew what they were doing. Of course, management was such that they believed the Road Warriors knew what they were doing, because the Road Warrior were the stars. The truth is, we worked hard and made them the stars ... but then they began to believe they really were the stars, without giving any thought to the work that went into making them the stars.

Salaries were another sore subject with me. When TBS took over, the salaries began to climb out of sight. I was all for paying the talent more than $100,000 a year because I was of the opinion that they should be able to make a decent living. The top talent working for me in Atlanta, people like Stan Hansen, Number Two, and Tommy Rich, earned about $100,000 a year ... not bad for a little southern, backwoods territory where the longest trip was 180 miles. That was back in the 1970s. Now we were in the 1990s, so

we definitely need to pay them $100,000. On the other hand, TBS should have required some conditions in return. We should have tied their salaries to the performance of the TV, in other words, the ratings, as well as the house show attendance numbers. I told Jim Herd, "If the houses are in the tank and nobody is buying tickets, then you need to cut back." I always operated under the belief that Ted Turner had to make money before the talent could make money. The guys should make good money, but they should be paid a salary in proportion to what they were drawing.

Even though we were giving away what I thought were just absurd sums of money, I tried to keep expenses down, but I still went overboard. In my own company, I never would have set things up the way they did at TBS. For instance, I hired Leon White, who wrestled as Van Vader. He worked for $600 a night. That was it. $600. He wrestled about eighteen times a year. Make it twenty. That's $12,000 a year. A few years later,

they were paying him $2.25 million a year. That's quite a stretch. Johnny B Badd went from an offer of $50,000 a year to $275,000 and a $75,000 clothing allowance. How ridiculous was that? Flair was making around $750,000, which to me was just nuts. I told The Suits at TBS, "That's crazy. Give him $300,000. That would be plenty. Give him $400,000. That would be a gift. Anything more than that would be ludicrous."

Regardless of what argument I came up with, though, they always told me, "No, you can't do things that way. You don't know what you're talking about."

Luger came to me and told me that he wanted to be the champion. I balked at the idea. "Hell, no!" Luger got so mad that he threw his keys at the wall of my office and the keys stuck in the wall. Flair had the belt at the time. I didn't even like Flair having it, but we didn't have anybody else who I felt was talented enough to take it. Flair was the best choice at that time. I would go to the

ring as a second for Flair, so I had to watch him wrestle Lex Luger. I hated it. I'd stop them after their match and say, "My God! The matches between you two are terrible." They would both laugh.

Flair was making $750,000 or more. Luger must have been making $500,000. They were paying me $250,000. $250,000? That was fine with me. I was happy with that. But paying those two more than a million dollars between them? I thought that was absurd. Worse than that, they were dumb enough to think they were going to continue making that amount of money forever. And worse than that, that amount of money wasn't even enough. They still complained and insisted that they should be paid more. After all, they both insisted that they were the stars.

Backstage politics were part of the reason that I got fired in 1990. In addition, I hated Herd, and he knew it. Every time I turned around, somebody was trying to stab me in the back. Luger, Flair and

Sting were all bad about crying to management. "Well, gee, Jim. We're the stars. Ole's just a guy who puts names on a piece of paper." I know of several people who said that. One day, I got a phone call from the secretary. "You can stay home, Ole." So I stayed home. I don't know for sure, but I suspect that Flair was behind that, big time, and so was Luger. To some degree, Sting may have been caught up in the behind-the-scenes shenanigans. Against all common sense, Herd bought into it. I would have told them, "Leave! Don't let the door hit you in the butt." I could bring in any musclehead and make him look like Luger. I could go find someone else, bleach his hair blond, and make him look like Flair. I could get a 200-pound baseball player, starve him for a few weeks, and make him look like Randy Savage. But Herd didn't understand that.

When I booked, the person I pushed was the person I thought had something to push. I wouldn't make such a brazen statement as to say I could take

any big, fat, tub of lard and turn him into a star. No! But you can put a guy in the ring or on camera and determine whether or not he has a certain charisma and a way of speaking that the people will like. There are thousands of guys who could do that. The question is, can you guide them or direct them in a way that will make money for the company?

As bad as things were during that time, we had a long run where our house shows were doing a total of $50,000 or more a day, and we were running two house shows a night, Monday through Sunday. Jimmy Crockett would come over and complain about the fact that we were only doing $50,000 a day. Jim Herd complained about it, too. They thought $50,000 was a bottom figure for the house, but I told them, "No. The worst house is when nobody comes in the door." They never understood what I was trying to say.

Jimmy Crockett would show up at the office on a weekly basis. When he sold his company to

Turner, he retained a piece of it, so he got a percentage of whatever the business did. Since he owned stock in the company, he wanted to second-guess everything. Jimmy was making his presence known. I would guess TBS wasn't paying him any dividends, and they were giving him financial figures that showed them taking big losses. If they were paying, he didn't think he was getting the amount of money he thought he was entitled to. Jimmy became critical of everything we did from that point on. As a stockholder, he had the right to complain, but keep in mind — this was the same guy who had put his own company into the toilet. He didn't know how to run the company when he owned it, but he wanted to tell everyone else how he would do it now.

I blew my top one afternoon during a meeting with Crockett, Herd, and some of the production staff. "Jimmy, just let me ask you one question. When did you ever come up with one finish? Not ten a night, or fifteen a night, but one? Tell me the first finish you ever came up

with. On second thought, let me ask a second question. Did you ever book one town, or two towns, or three towns ... on one night? How about a third question? Did you ever book a TV? Let me know when that was. Oh, I just thought of a fourth question. Have you ever been in the ring? Did I say five questions? Who was the first talent you ever took from nothing and made into a superstar? There are so many things you've never done, so it must be easy to criticize someone who's doing it. If you have an idea that works, I'll be more than happy to use it. In fact, if you've got an idea, even if it doesn't work, I'll be more than happy to use it, just to show you that it doesn't work. The fact is, you can't come up with the first simple finish. I've gotta come up with thirty of them a day."

He just shriveled. He was stuck. He didn't know what to say. All Herd could do was sit there and say, "Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah ..." I thought I was going to get fired right then, but I was so mad that I didn't care. I said, "You guys all know so much about

how to run this business. Why don't you just go ahead and do it!" I stormed out of the room and went back to my office. I was really mad at Jimmy because in all the years that I had known him, Jimmy never had anything constructive to say about how the matches should be run, or how the talent should be handled. He relied on George Scott at first, and then me. After I left, of course, he tried Dory Funk. Jimmy was just lucky that he inherited his spot from his father, who was smart enough to direct his business to the point where it didn't get out of control. Jimmy did just the opposite. He fell prey to Dusty's romancing and machinations. The next thing you know, Jimmy was buying Dusty a car and an airplane. He was flushing his money down the toilet.

Later that day, Herd came back and tried to calm me down. "Settle down, settle down." I did so many things that got them upset because I wasn't willing to go along with their nonsense. The time I spent at TBS was the only time that I was forced to accept ideas from other people. Herd and I would

get together once in awhile, but it wasn't too often because I didn't want or need his input. I told Herd so many times, "That's the dumbest idea you've come up with yet."

That was my last attempt to try to do anything of substance with the business. I just gave up at that point. There was nothing else to do. That was in 1990, the year that I introduced the Black Scorpion.

I hit on the idea of the Black Scorpion by accident. In fact, the idea was a byproduct of that meeting with Crockett and Herd. An hour or so after I walked out of the meeting, and after Herd came back to calm me down, I handed Herd a card listing a whole series of ridiculous ideas that came right off the top of my head. "We're going to match Sting against the Black Scorpion," I told him.

He liked the idea.

I was dumbfounded. "How could you like it? It's

just a name! Do you understand what I"m saying? I'm not talking about a person. I'm not talking about a wrestler. I'm not talking about anybody. I'm just talking about a name!"

"Yeah, but that name is great."

So the marvelous idea for the Black Scorpion came about because I was trying to be facetious after getting mad at Jimmy Crockett. The Suits all thought that idea was great! Everybody went crazy over it. "My God! This is great!" Now I had to figure out how to make the name draw the fans, so everyone could make money.

To this day, the fans speculate as to who would be behind the mask of the Black Scorpion at the end of the angle, but I never had a definitive person in mind. We had several different people disguised as the Scorpion at various times, but it didn't matter who it was because we weren't going to expose his identity until the big blowoff. Everybody was the Black Scorpion, and

nobody was. In voice, I was. I did the deep voice of the Scorpion in the background. I would get on the microphone when Sting was in the ring. "Stin-nnnng!" I could see the ring, but nobody could see me. Of course, Sting would be looking around, trying to figure out where the voice was coming from. It worked, to whatever degree. Was I happy about it? No! But Herd thought it was pretty good. It was different and unique.

In October 1990, we were putting on a show at the UIC Pavillion at the University of Illinois in Chicago. At David Crockett's suggestion, we had decided to interject a magician into the mix. On the night of the show, I wanted to be sure the magician had everything set up, so Ronnie West, Jody Hamilton and I all piled into the car to drive over to the Pavillion. Herd expected us to be back at the hotel by 4:30 p.m. because he had a big meeting planned. It took more time than I thought to get things set up at the Pavillion, so we weren't at the hotel when Herd was expecting us. When I walked into the hotel, Herd confronted me. He

was just beside himself. "Dammit! Don't worry about being here on time. These meetings aren't important! Just show up whenever you'd like." Well, he was right about one thing. They weren't important. I told him I had a lot of things that I had to take care of and I apologized for being late, but that was just how things go when you're putting a big show like that together.

If I remember the sequence of events at the show correctly, Sting was coming out to get the Black Scorpion. Just before he reached him, a curtain came up, surrounding the Scorpion. When Sting pulled the curtain down, the Black Scorpion had vanished — and immediately reappeared where Sting had been just seconds before, about a hundred feet away. Even I was impressed with it. The Scorpion is over here — and now he's over there. It was pretty good.

The first Black Scorpion that night was a girl wearing the Black Scorpion outfit. She stood on a platform that was set on a stand. The platform was

only six to eight inches in thickness, but it didn't look that thick to the audience. It looked like it was just a board, so the idea that someone was able to hide in there was almost impossible to imagine. I couldn't put my head in there. When the curtain went up, she slid through a trap door in the platform and laid down inside it. The magician reappeared in another spot disguised as the Black Scorpion.

There's no question that it was all nonsense. It was like a magic show. You know the woman isn't really getting sawed in half with the circular saw, but you still can't quite figure out how it was done. There was enough mystery to grab the attention of the people and make them wonder, "How did they do that?" That was the effect. Just as Sting reached out to grab the Scorpion, the Scorpion disappeared.

I had another big idea planned for the Thanksgiving show, but they fired me before it took place. My idea would be something to the

effect that Sting would wrestle and defeat the Black Scorpion. As Sting looks down at his fallen opponent, the Scorpion's voice would resonate over the PA system. "This isn't the end, Sting. It's only the beginning." As the echoes of the voice fades, the Scorpion was going to melt and slowly disappear. An instant later, Sting looks up at the ceiling of the arena. Of course, the people would follow Sting's gaze and look up. There's now a new menace preparing to take over where the Black Scorpion left off. It was going to be a continual onslaught of cosmic forces that were after Sting.

For all intents and purposes, everybody was of the opinion at that point that this was the direction that wrestling had to go, and that's what we did. By that time, there was no wrestling at all. I tried to have wrestling matches, but The Suits all thought wrestling was out of date, that there was no place for wrestling. After all, this was the '90s. I had to go along with the program. We had already done so much crap that we didn't even make an

attempt to be sensible. Of course, Herd fired me, not knowing what the ending was going to be, and he hired Dusty Rhodes. I never told anybody where I intended to go with the Black Scorpion idea. I don't know where they went with the angle, but they did some sort of blowoff at the 1990 Starrcade in St. Louis.

Back to my story about the show in Chicago. Herd took me aside before the show began and told me to fire Stan Hansen. Later that night, I went to Hansen and explained the situation. "Herd wants me to fire you, but what I want you to do is take him into the back room and tell him you won't work for less than $1,000 a night."

When Stan began working for us, we paid him $500 a show. In 1990, $500 a show was a lot of money. Hansen said, "You're crazy! If he's gonna fire me, and I'm only making five hundred, why is he gonna give me a thousand?"

"Just try it," I suggested. "What do you have to lose?"

"Well, fuck him! I'll just quit."

"No, no, no, Stan. Do what I'm telling you to do. Grab that idiot's arm and pull him into that room. Tell him you want a thousand bucks." There was a room underneath the grandstands at the Pavillion. Hansen grabbed Herd's elbow and guided him into the room. About ten minutes later, Herd walked out. Twenty seconds later, Hansen walked out. He was all smiles. "I don't understand it," he said, shaking his head.

"Did it work?"

"Yeah! He just gave me $1,000 a shot." From that night on, Hansen got a thousand, instead of 500.

Why did Herd give him the raise? Well, he was a little bit scared of Stan. You just never knew

about Stan, and I think Jim was worried about what he might do.

During the matches that night, Stan was wrestling Lex Luger. He knocked Luger to the mat and said, "You little sh–," then spit a big stream of tobacco juice down Luger's chest. Luger's response was to lay there and take it because he wasn't man enough to do anything about it. What could be more humiliating? Luger may deny it, but I can find fourteen other people who will confirm the story. Luger was scared to death. Stan was just goofy enough that he gave you pause to wonder what might happen if you crossed him. Stan used to hurt me all the time, and that was when he was working. Talk about clumsy! He was all elbows and fists. Stan could kill you during the process of saying hello. Imagine what he might do if he was shooting.

At the end of the night, after the matches were over, we were scheduled to do interviews. One of the interviews was going to involve Stan and

Herd. I said to Herd, "Listen, Stan gets out of hand, so I want to make sure that the people in charge, in particular you, let him know that you're not going to tolerate any of his crap." Herd was acting fidgety and kind of nervous, so I said, "Just tell him. If he gives you any lip, just get in his face and tell him that you're in charge. You're the authority ... the sheriff, the head honcho. He's going to listen to you or he's going to find himself out on the street."

We do the interview and Stan starts ranting. Nobody can tell Stan what to do. I motioned for Herd to walk on-camera. All Herd said was, "That's enough, Stan Hansen." Stan turned around and began chewing him out. As he ranted and raved, his tobacco juice was spraying all over Herd. It was just the greatest thing to watch. I was laughing so hard. Herd wanted to get offstage, but I was prompting him off-camera. "Tell him that you're the boss!" Herd made a half-hearted attempt at it, but Stan just kept on spitting and spraying. Everybody was laughing

because Herd ended up looking ridiculous. When the interview was over, Herd walked over and asked me, "How did I do?" He had tobacco stains all over his suit. It was all I could do to keep a straight face. I said, "Oh, that was great."

I remember another example of Herd being intimidated. Sometime around the end of September, we were in Charleston, South Carolina. Herd told me to fire the Samoans. I went to them and I said, "Hey, you two guys will finish up in four weeks. You guys shouldn't have a problem getting work with Vince. You have four weeks, and then you're out of here." They were really mad at me. They were whining and moaning.

An hour or so later, before the show started, I saw Herd standing on the other side of the stage, huddled in a corner with the Samoans. As I walked up to find out what was going on, Herd said, "You don't have to fire these guys. They can stay." Herd made it sound like it was my idea to

fire them, which it wasn't, and it was his idea to keep them, which it wasn't. I looked at them and said, "Okay, you guys can stay." It didn't bother me one way or the other. I was working for the company and was doing what I was told. The Samoans weren't being pushed prominently, anyway. They were just bodies. I didn't know them very well, but then again, I didn't have much association with anybody during that time.

That was on a Friday or Saturday night. On Monday morning, when I walked into the office, the first thing Herd said to me was, "I want those two Samoans fired."

I said, "Dammit, Jim! You told me to fire them. I did. Then you told me to hire them back. I did. Now you want me to fire them again? No, you fire them."

I believe the whole situation boiled down to the fact that Herd was scared to death of them. That Wednesday, we were at the Center Stage Theater

in Atlanta. One of the Samoans asked if they could talk to me. Not thinking anything about it, I said, "Sure." We went into a room, which again was underneath the stands. One of them shut the door behind us. The other one stood right in front of me. Apparently, they thought they were going to beat the hell out of me. Even though they had been told that they could stay, but they were pissed at me because I fired them the first time. I said, "Okay, what's your beef?"

"You're treating us like niggers," they accused. Those were their words, not mine.

I said, "No. That's not true. it's just a business decision to let you go, and this business doesn't owe you anything." Things got heated and they began making noise about beating the hell out of me. I said, "I'll tell you what. You can try to kick my ass, and maybe you'll succeed, but one of you guys is gonna lose an eye. Who wants to be first?" They changed their tune.

"We just want to work, but you treat us like niggers," they repeated.

"I've already told you. That ain't it." I tried to explain the situation. "Listen, Jim Herd told me to fire you, so I fired you. He told me to hire you back. I hired you back. Then he told me to fire you again just the other day. I didn't fire you again, did I?"

"Well, uh, uh, uh, uh, uh."

"Then stop the bullsh–. That stuff doesn't work with me." That was the end of it. I walked out the door. I think they were still with the promotion when I left in November ... I mean, when I got fired in November.

Herd, along with just about everyone at TBS, didn't know anything whatsoever about wrestling. None of them thought being able to wrestle was important. Herd was intent on doing one thing — spending money. I suppose I need to

be more specific. He was intent on spending Ted Turner's money. Herd's forte was spending money like it fell from the sky. We used to take trips all over the country for meetings — Chicago, Boston, New York, San Francisco. We had meetings once a week with about 25 people — the staff, the local promoters, the television production crew, and some of the guys who were considered to be the "top boys." For the most part, it was Flair, Sullivan and Cornette. It was just a waste of time and money.

Figure it out. We were spending something like $30,000 and more, running all over the country for each of his idiotic meetings. TBS paid for hotels, food, air fare, car rentals, and who know what else. Herd also had to rent a conference room where we could hold the meetings. I asked him one time, "Why don't we hold these meetings right here in Atlanta and save the travel expense?" For the most part, if 25 or 30 people were coming to the meeting, most of them, like 27 out of 30, lived right there in Atlanta. If we held the meetings in

Atlanta, there would be no air expense, no hotel expense, no rental car expense, and no food expense.

"Well, that's what you don't understand," Herd said in a condescending tone of voice.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Ole, you might know wrestling, but you don't understand how big business works. If you're not spending big money, people don't think you're doing anything important." That was his philosophy. He told me that over and over and over. Spend big money so it looks like you're doing something. That's pretty close to a verbatim quote. So we would go to Boston, St. Louis, or Chicago, and we would spend approximately $35,000 for each meeting. We would be up there for two days, so we would get there a day early, then have the meeting the following day. It was Ted Turner's money, so everybody rented a Lincoln or a Cadillac. Not only that, but each

individual rented their own car. They didn't double or triple up, or ride four to a car.

One time when I was on the road and in Cincinnati, I was going to buy a discount ticket for $125 and fly from Cincinnati to Chicago for one of Herd's pointless meetings. When he found out about it, he went berserk. By this time, he was shifting into an economy mode, so he had Louise Bennett, our secretary, set me up with a rental car. "Jim's pretty upset," she warned. "He doesn't want you to fly because it costs too much money. I have a car reserved for you."

I explained to her. "Tell Herd that I got this plane ticket for 125 bucks." She said that Herd insisted that I drive, so the office rented a Lincoln and I drove the car to Chicago. But! You have to remember that this was a one-way trip. When I arrived in Chicago, I checked the car in. The total charges for the car rental was $500 and change. There was a rental charge, a mileage charge, and a drop charge because the car wasn't

being returned to the city where it was rented.

That was the way Jim Herd did business. In this instance, I don't think he did that with the intention of spending more money. I'm sure he thought he was saving money, but he never even looked at the alternatives. They did things like that all the time. When we were reserving motel rooms, I would tell them, "We can get a decent motel down the road for forty bucks."

"Oh, no! You can't do that!"

In some cases, they told Louise to reserve rooms in a particular hotel. They didn't give any thought to the fact that the rooms in that hotel cost $100 to $125 a night. In 1990, I could buy hotels for what they were spending.

Herd would throw a little tantrum once in awhile about expenses, but basically, he was all for dipping into Turner's pockets and spending money. It got even worse in later years when Bill

Shaw took over. I never heard Shaw say, "If you're not spending big money, people don't think you're doing anything," but he spent barrels of money.

One day, Herd told me about an idea that he wanted me to try. I said, "Jim, that doesn't make one bit of sense." And it didn't!

"I don't care. That's what I want," he insisted.

I eventually gave in, but I told him how I felt about the idea. "All right. I'll do it because you want it, but if we do, and it doesn't work, and it doesn't draw any money, you have to have enough balls to admit that it was your idea and take the responsibility for it. I'm not gonna be accountable for it."

"What do you mean?" Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

At the time, I never heard anyone blame me for the bad ideas. I wasn't privy to those

conversations, but I do know that the bad ideas were mine ... even if they weren't. You know good and well what's going on behind your back when people give you the raised eyebrow and ask, "What in the hell are you doing?"

If you remember, Herd is the same person who told me at one point, "You know, you have to be sure you have somebody expendable between you and the door." In other words, I need someone to blame if things don't turn out well. And that's essentially what he did with me. He kept me between himself and the door. When things didn't go well, the boss would come down and yell, "Dammit! What the hell happened?"

Of course, Herd would immediately counter with, "Well, you know, I'm not an expert in wrestling. That's why we hired Ole."

Our conflicts all came to a head one night when Sting stopped me at the bottom of the stairwell in Marietta. He wanted to talk to me in private

because he was mad about something that was going on. I told him the truth.

"Dammit, Sting! How stupid are you? If you think that's my idea, then you're dumber than I think you are. Don't you realize that I'm not the one calling that shot? I would never even think of doing that kind of crap. The guy who told me to do that was Jim Herd. Do you think in my right mind that I would do something stupid like that? Herd wanted me to do it, so I had to do it. If you have a gripe, why don't you go talk to him?"

We heard a noise and Sting looked up, then he looked back at me and pointed upwards. Jim Herd was standing two floors up in the stairwell. Of course, he heard everything I said. He didn't have to overhear it, though. I had told him the same thing to his face a hundred different times. I walked into his office one day and said, "You know. That suit coat and tie might mean a lot to people around here, but it doesn't mean a damn thing to me. I've been cut and stabbed, and

everything that can happen to me has happened. You sure as hell aren't gonna scare me with that fancy suit coat." I hit the door on the way out and put a big dent in it.

Herd didn't care for the comments I made to Sting, and added to the other things that I had said to him personally, he decided that I needed to be replaced. Dusty Rhodes became a candidate for my job. Jim Herd wanted somebody who was very much like he was, and Dusty fit that bill. Looking back, I believe they had been working on it for several months. A few days later, I was on the road when I got a call from the secretary. "Ole, they don't want you to come to work anymore." They didn't tell me in person. They had the secretary call me. I immediately came back to Atlanta and went down to the Omni, where our offices were located. When I walked in, they had cops waiting for me. One of the cops said, "Ole, you can't go upstairs." Not only did they have five or six cops downstairs, but I was later told that they had

guards on the tenth floor where we had our offices. I don't know why they needed security there because the cops weren't going to let me on the elevator in the first place. I guess they thought I was going to come down there and shoot everybody, or punch everybody out. Now that I've had time to reflect on it, at that time, I was still dumb enough that I might have let my emotions get the better of me. I have no idea what would have happened, but I sure wanted to have a confrontation with Herd.

As I said, I'm not quite sure how it happened, but I know Herd had already been working on a deal to get Dusty in there. Apparently, he had been talking to Dusty for several months. I wasn't aware of it at the time, but I became aware of it because of things that happened when I wanted to bring Dusty's son Dustin in. Dustin agreed to come in. I even talked to Dusty about it. Everyone was in favor of it, so I had plans for Dustin to come in at the end of August. The kid never showed up. At the time, I didn't know what was

going on, but I found out later that Herd had been talking to Dusty. Dusty didn't want Dustin to make his big debut until after Dusty took over. He didn't want me to use him.

It could have been a combination of Barnett, Crockett, and Herd getting Dusty. At that time, I wasn't aware that Dusty was involved to any extent, but I did know that Crockett was mad at me because I had told him off so many times. What I couldn't understand was why Crockett was still in love with Dusty, even after Dusty took Crockett's multi-million dollar business and flushed it right down the toilet. When people ask me why Jimmy continued to use Dusty, I don't have an answer, other than the fact that he was blown away by Dusty's bullsh–. Dusty told Jimmy what Jimmy wanted to hear. I never did.

It could have been any number of things, but I'm reasonably certain that they were all party to the idea that Dusty should come in, because Dusty's personality was more along the lines of, "That's

great, Jim. That's great. Ooh, that's a great idea. That's shooper, Jim. That's what we need." He would go out with The Suits for dinner and drinks. I wouldn't be seen walking across the street with them. That was the big difference between me and — well, everybody else for that matter. That being the case, who would you want to have around — me, or Dusty?

Dusty would do the same thing with the talent. If I had something to say, I would just tell the talent, "You know, you screwed up. That was a damned stupid thing to do. Either you rethink your game plan and start making some changes, or you're out of here." Given the same scenario, Dusty would say, "Well, what you did was great, but I think ..." That summed up the difference between Dusty and me. Of course, most of the time, when someone screwed up, Dusty didn't even realize they had screwed up. And as long as Dusty wasn't spending his money, Dusty didn't care how much money was being spent.

Chapter 43
The “World” Heavyweight Title

In the days before Lou Thesz became the champion, featuring a match for the world heavyweight title was just about the only way you could draw any real money, even though some people were already aware, to whatever extent, that wrestling wasn’t all a shoot. Even before Lou’s time, several incidents took place that made people aware of that fact. The first major expose came about when allegations were made that Frank Gotch paid someone to hurt George Hackenschmidt before their match in 1911. That killed the wrestling business for a short time because people thought the match had been fixed. That soon settled down, but other exposes popped up in the ensuing years. The newspapers would report, "John Smith

and Bill Franklin were traveling together. They claimed to be enemies from birth and were supposed to wrestle each other tonight, yet they were traveling in the same car that ran into Mr. and Mrs. Schwartz on Route 62 just outside of Beloit, Wisconsin."

The cumulative effect, of exposes over the next six decades, in my opinion, resulted in the fact that the championship by itself was no longer enough to draw.

When Lou Thesz was the champion, the world heavyweight title still meant something. I suppose that during the time when he was the champion, they could advertise him coming to town and draw a house. I wouldn't say it was a guarantee, but to some degree, an appearance by Lou probably drew on its own merit. By the 1970s, however, it became very difficult to draw a house based solely on an appearance by the champion. When Dusty was the champion, he would say, "People come just to see Dusty Rhodes." I'll give him that. To

some degree, and for a short period of time, they did.

For some reason, though, Jim Herd and Jim Barnett still had the notion that the world title was the be-all and end-all of drawing big money. What does that tell you? It tells you that they didn't know how to run the wrestling business. In my opinion, if you thought the only way you could draw a house was to have the world champion on the card, or Art the clown and Talullah, then you were doing a lousy job of booking. You should have been fired because you didn't know how to book.

When Harley Race and Ric Flair held the belt, or for that matter, even when Dory Funk Jr. or Jack Brisco were the champions, we didn't advertise, "Dory Funk, the NWA champion, is coming to Augusta," and expect a sellout. If we were doing good business at the time, we might get a sellout, but if we were doing lousy business, we continued to do lousy business. What you also have to

realize is that in Atlanta during the ‘70s and ‘80s, we were already doing really good business. If you were drawing big houses, which we were, then you didn’t need the champion. In fact, it was to your advantage to not have the champion.

Why did I feel this way?

There’s one simple answer. The NWA champion was supposed to be paid 10 percent of the house. Why would we want to pay 10 percent of the house to the champion when we were already doing good business? We didn’t need the champion to draw money. That was the reason I didn’t want to use Harley Race when he was the champion. It had nothing to do with Harley personally. I didn’t want to use any of the champions. In addition to that, I didn’t want to give Barnett an excuse to short the rest of the boys on their payoffs.

Barnett used to hold meetings every so often. He would tell all the guys to come down to the Sports

Arena, an old building that Paul Jones used to own, where we taped the TV. There would be 30 or 40 of the wrestlers there. An amusing incident happened at one of those meetings. Barnett said, "Boys, next week, the champion will be in the territory. As you know, we have to pay the champion 10 percent, and we have to pay an additional 3 percent to the National Wrestling Alliance. That means you boys will be getting a check for a little bit less than you normally get."

A voice piped up from the back, "Jim, judging by my checks, the champion has been here all year." Of course, all the guys laughed. As we were walking out, Jim said, "Oh, that was very funny. Who was that?"

"That was Frank Morrell. He's a part-time comedian."

"He's really funny," Barnett agreed. "Fire him!"

I didn't fire Frank, but I told him to keep his

mouth shut.

Harley and I got a little sideways because I didn't want to pay him the 10 percent. I told him once, "We can work out a deal where I pay you more than a regular payoff. We're already guaranteed a big house because we're drawing big money down here without the title, so the last thing I want is for the rest of the guys to be unhappy because we're giving you a big payday and cutting their pay." Needless to say, Harley wasn't happy, and wouldn't agree to a cut in pay. He wanted his 10 percent when he wrestled in Georgia.

The solution? Don't book him in Georgia. And that's what we did. Oh, we still used him on occasion, but just not as often. Instead, the champion was booked in other territories. Hopefully, he got his 10 percent.

If Harley had agreed to take a smaller percentage in Georgia, it still would have been a good payday. For instance, six percent of the house at

the Omni, in the mid-70s, was around $3,000. But he refused, so he was free to be booked in places like Norfolk, Nebraska, where 10 percent of the house might be $200 or less. In a case like that, Harley didn't make as much money as he would have if he had worked in Atlanta for six percent. But at least he got his 10 percent — and that's what counts.

In his biography, Lou Thesz talked about promoters paying the world champion 10 percent. I'm not sure if the promoters were really paying 10 percent, primarily due to the fact that it was almost impossible for anyone to really figure what the 10 percent was based on. Lou also talked about being able to figure the house. Maybe he was able to do that, but it didn't take long for promoters to learn the ins and outs of screwing the boys out of their rightful percentage.

In my opinion, and I'm sure Lou knew this, Lou could count the house all he wanted, but until he knew for certain what the seating arrangement was,

there was no way of knowing exactly how much the house was. I counted the house, too, but what I did was get a copy of the blueprints for the building. That would show me the prices charged for the different sections, so I knew exactly what the house should be. I never did that on anything but a sellout. If I had a sellout, then I would get the building to provide me with a copy of the seating arrangements. You knew exactly how many people were there, and you also knew what the prices were, so I could figure it right up to the dollar.

I discovered that I was getting shafted almost every night and in almost every town. We always suspected that, but nobody knew it as well as I did because I took the time to break it down. I'm sure Lou never had a blueprint of the building. He might have gone out and estimated there was X number of people and multiplied that times an average of the ticket prices. Of course, that was easier to figure when the building was full. For instance, when I first came to Georgia, ringside tickets were around $2.50. General admission

was $1.50. If the building was full, the only thing I was concerned about was how many the building would hold. If they told me the building held 5,000 people, and the place was sold-out, then I knew we had somewhere around $10,000. It was probably less because there were more general admission seats than there were ringside. The average might be more like $1.70. Whatever amount you use as an average, you could multiply that times 5,000 and come up with a figure. You couldn't come out right on the money, but you could get close.

Unless someone figured the house with a blueprint of the seating, I don't know how anyone could come up with much more than an educated guess. Lou may have been satisfied with his payoff. If the building seated 12,000 people and tickets averaged two bucks, maybe he got close to the true figure. Of course, he also had another wrench thrown into the works. How much were the taxes? Did the promoters tell him the taxes were 7 percent, or 10 percent? I don't know how

closely he checked. He may have thought he was driving a hard bargain and pinning the promoters to the wall, but I would question whether or not he was getting his rightful percentage because I saw a lot of swerves going on that were very clever.

First of all, I would be willing to bet that most of the promoters, if not all of the promoters, were skimming money off the top in the box office. I doubt there were very many promoters who weren't skimming money. In fact, it wasn't uncommon for anybody who had access to the money to take a few bucks. It was easy for a percentage of the cash to walk off. It was typical of promoters and people who worked for them to pick up a few extra, tax-free bucks. In the city of Atlanta alone, the promotion could pick up $2,000, $3,000, or $4,000 a week — maybe even more.

We all suspected that the promoter in Columbia, South Carolina, was skimming money. He had a son who was a little bit less than 100 percent. One night, I told the promoter, "Why don't we trade

places tonight. Why don't you and that idiot son of yours put some tights on and wrestle. Go out there and see if you can draw a house. While you're doing that, Gene and I will do your job. We'll go steal the money out of the box office." The promoter took his jacket off. He was going to fight me.

Anybody who was handling the shows could be guilty of taking a few bucks off the top and, in most cases, taking it back to the office. That person would call the promoter with a gross figure, and the promoter would tell them how much they needed off the top.

"We did a gross business of $40,000."

"Okay, let's call it $36,000."

As I said earlier, the people who worked for us in the Atlanta wrestling office were doing it, and for the most part, they were doing it at the behest of someone in the office. There were many times

when I was instructed to take X number of dollars from the box office receipts and change the figures on the house. I then took the cash to the office. Ronnie West, Charlie Smith, Charlie Harben, and Bobby Simmons were all asked to do the same thing.

The only time I saw tickets counted was when we were running the towns up in the Ohio area. At that point, we were actually tracking tickets. In Charlotte and Atlanta, nobody cared about tickets. The only thing the office wanted to know was the amount of money in the box office. If the box office took in $10,000, you gave the sponsoring organization their $1,000 and walked out with $9,000 in your pocket. Now, the question is — did the entire $9,000 make it to the office and show up on the books? If it didn't, how much was taken off the top by the promoter before it was recorded and deposited? And what concerned me the most was — were the boys paid based on the actual gate, or the amount entered in the company books?

And the promoters weren't the only ones. There were a million ways the people in the box office could screw you. They were really slick. They could do things right in front of you and you would never know you were being scammed. Even the people who knew what to look for could be fooled. If the promoter had been promoting for years, he could walk away with just about everything and you wouldn't have a clue to what was going on. I tried to explain that to the people at TBS. It was a waste of my breath. They couldn't understand it. They didn't have a clue that they were getting robbed every night. What did they do about it? They sent someone to keep an eye on the box office. Who did they send? They sent girls from the front office, whose primary job at TBS was to type letters all day long. Did they think those women were going to put an end to the box office scams? Come on! Those broads had never seen a ticket in their life. They had no idea how to count the tickets that weren't sold, or compare them to the manifest to find out what tickets had been sold.

They should have sent someone like Ralph Freed, who knew the cons that were going on. Ralph had been taking care of the business for years in the Macon and Columbus end of the territory. He knew everything about it and tried to do it straight. WCW finally asked him to run some of their towns. Ralph once told me, "You know, if I had been smart, I should have just stolen all the money I could. They never would have known."

One typical swerve involved someone reselling the tickets that had already been sold. When the fans came through the turnstiles, they handed their ticket to the person at the door. That person was supposed to tear the ticket in half and hand one half back to the buyer. What happens if the person at the door collects 500 tickets and doesn't rip them in half? That happened all the time. The ticket sellers would just keep the ticket. A few minutes later, they would casually stroll over to the box office and hand the ticket seller the whole, untorn tickets. The ticket seller would then resell the ticket. At the end of the night, they pocketed the

money from the extra tickets. It was so easy to knock down the box office.

We would send rolls of tickets to the arenas, numbered 0001 through 1,000. We sent blue tickets, red tickets, green tickets, brown tickets. That still didn't solve the problem because the box office people would smuggle their own tickets into the box office. They had their own rolls of tickets, in all shades and colors. Anyone who has a brain can think up ingenious ways to swerve you.

The easiest way to scam the box office was the simplest. The promoters would use what we called the 10% System. If you take in $50,000, you put $5,000 in your pocket. Throw the correct number of tickets away and write $45,000 in the manifest. If that seems to be too complicated, you can use a method that is even more basic — the Promoter System. Take any amount of money you want, throw all the tickets away, and write whatever figures you want in the manifest.

I've taken the long way around, but the point I'm getting around to is, between the box office swerves, promoters overstating taxes, and promoters taking money off the top, I don't know if any of the world champions really got the 10 percent they had coming to them. The promoters were supposed to pay a flat 10 percent to the champion and 3 percent to the NWA, but when it came right down to it, the promoters made that decision arbitrarily. "How much do we want to pay him?" I'll guarantee you that nobody got 10 percent after taxes. You got 10 percent ... but 10 percent of what? You could figure it any way you wanted to figure it. There was just no way to really know for sure. What I do know is that there were a lot of houses where we paid the champions a lot of money. Even Lou says that. He had weeks where he made ten grand. He also claimed to have made $200,000 a year.

During my time as booker, there were several people who held the NWA world heavyweight title, but just two of them, Harley Race and Ric

Flair, literally loved that title. The world champions were different from each other in many respects, but there were certain characteristics that defined each one of them. Jack Brisco was a NCAA wrestling champion. Dory Funk was a first-rate worker. Gene Kiniski was a great athlete. Harley Race was a tough guy. In my opinion, the difference between Harley and the other three is that Harley thought he actually beat someone for the belt. The funny thing about that was — he might have been able to.

To demonstrate Harley's mindset, I'll tell you one story. In the '70s, I held a big tournament in Georgia. I had a huge trophy built. It stood 6 feet tall and it took two people to haul it down to the ring. I forget how much money we paid for it, but it was somewhere around $500. To me, that was a lot of money for a cockamamy, meaningless trophy. Harley won the tournament. On the following morning, we were taping our television show. I wanted to get a shot of the trophy on television, but we couldn't find it

anywhere. "How in the hell could we lose a trophy that big?" I asked. I chewed out Ronnie West, the referee. I chewed out Charlie McGowen and the ring crew. They were supposed to bring it back and put it in storage, so they were looking all over for it. I think Harley wrestled Mr. Wrestling #2 in the final match of the tournament, so I called Number Two. When I asked him if he knew what happened to it, he said, "I think it was still in the dressing room when I left."

The only other person I knew to call was Harley. I asked him, "When did you last see that trophy? Do you have any idea who might have taken it?" It suddenly got quiet on the other end of the line. Harley didn't say a word. "Dammit, Harley! I want to find that trophy! It cost me a lot of money. If I find out who took it, I'm gonna hang the bastard!"

Harley began to stutter. "Uh ... uh ... I thought you wanted me to take it home."

"What?!" I wasn't quite sure that I had heard him correctly.

"Well, I thought ..."

"You've got it?"

I don't know how he got it home because he had to take a plane back to Kansas City. As big as that trophy was, I have no idea how he could have carried it onto the plane. Knowing Harley, he probably threw his bags away and hand-carried the trophy on the plane. I have no doubt that he carried the trophy all through the airport, then onto the plane, all the while telling people that he just won it in a big tournament at the Omni! I laughed out loud. I couldn't believe it. I said, "Harley, you're the biggest mark!" And he was. Correction, he is.

If you walk into Harley's house, I'll guarantee you that the trophy is the first thing you'll stumble over. After you pick yourself up off the floor, you'll see wall after wall of his pictures. I haven't

been inside his house, but I would almost be willing to bet on it. It's not that hard to imagine.

And before you get all pissed off, Harley, I also want to say this. Harley was one of the best workers I ever saw, and he was tough enough, and crazy enough, to be dangerous. And when all the BS is cleared away ... Harley was one hell of a guy. I still don't think you could book worth a damn, Harley, but that's just my opinion. I could be wrong.

Leon Baxter — Tarzan Baxter — worked in Charlotte with El Gaucho, Juan Sebastian. We used to joke about Baxter. "Give him a belt and he won't complain about how bad the payoff is."

"How much am I getting paid?"

"Oh, we're not paying you anything, but you're going to be the champion."

"Oh, great."

A lot of the guys were like that. Come on! What's wrong with that picture? Pick up the phone and call Reggie Parks. He'll make you all the belts you want. I never cared about winning a belt. I wanted to make money. If we promised to give somebody $4,000 a week and reneged on the promise — now that's something they could hang their hat on. I couldn't have cared less about the world title belt, either. Sure, it would be great to be recognized as the champion, but why would you want the hassle if you weren't making the money.

Just two years ago, I was asking people in Las Vegas if they had any pictures of me, because I don't have any. If the business had been a shoot, that would be one thing, but it isn't. Even when I was shooting with the marks, I don't have a medal, or pictures, or anything like that. That's all over and done with. Forget about it. I just wanted to make my money and go home. It was only in the last few years that I thought, Jeez, it would be nice to have a few pictures of myself when I was young, mainly to show to my kids, or whoever it might

be. Every now and then, I mention to someone that I used to weigh 280 pounds. People say, "Yeah, sure ... and your IQ is 170." Well, actually it's 173, but we won't quibble over a few points.

I wouldn't want the schedule the world champions had. They would fly into Tokyo. After the matches, they would fly all night long to get back for a show in Atlanta, then turn right around and fly back to Tokyo for a show on the following night. I wouldn't even give that a thought. I wouldn't be the least bit interested in flying from Charlotte to San Francisco, then back to Atlanta, let alone throwing Tokyo into the mix. I can't imagine that many of the guys would want to do that, either. As I already explained, in Atlanta, for instance, we were paying the top guys somewhere between $80,000 and $100,000, and sometimes more. Even Minneapolis was a nice payday because they only worked fifteen days out of the month. In Atlanta, during a 31-day month, you worked about 42 times. My guess is that Verne's champion, Nick Bockwinkel, was making $85,000

to $100,000 a year. However, he was always close to home. Why would he want to bounce around the world when he could stay around Minneapolis and make the money he was making? And enjoy all that time off.

When Ric Flair held the NWA title, I didn't use the reasoning that I wasn't going to book him because I didn't want to pay the 10 percent. I just didn't want him. Barnett used to get upset with me because I didn't want to use Flair. He would say, "Well, my God! I'm the secretary of the National Wrestling Alliance and I book the champion. It doesn't look very good if I'm booking the champion and I don't even use him in my own territory." I went along with Barnett now and then just to pacify him, but we didn't use the champions any more than we had to. Most of the time, I stuck to my guns and said, "We don't need him." And we didn't. I didn't want Harley Race or Ric Flair. I like Harley. I used to like Flair. But it didn't matter whether I liked them or not. I just didn't feel like we needed them.

I helped Ric Flair become the world champion in 1981. In 1981, I made a recommendation to Eddie Graham, who had a lot of power and influence with the NWA, to make Ric Flair the NWA world heavyweight champion. Anybody else can say what they want to say, but that's exactly what happened. Now, I'll qualify what I mean by that because I really didn't have any say-so one way or the other. Eddie Graham played a big part in that decision.

When I began booking the Carolinas territory in February 1981, Flair was wrestling there. I liked Ric, but I thought it would be a good idea if he left the territory for awhile. When Ric first started in the business, he was a breath of fresh air. But after a few years, the fresh air turned stale. He needed a change, and so did the Carolinas. Making Flair the champion would solve the problem. He would be a good champion, and he would be out of the territory, so I talked to Eddie about making him the champion. The NWA was gearing up to make a change, so I made the suggestion, "What about

Flair? He dresses well and has a lot of personality. I think he'd do a good job." And Flair did! In my mind, he wasn't a great worker, but in all fairness, there was a reason why he wasn't a great worker. He was still young. But since he had such a great personality, and since he looked the part, I thought he was good enough to represent the National Wrestling Alliance. The bottom line, though, was that I just wanted to get him out of the Carolinas. I didn't want it to be at the expense of the rest of the world, but I thought he could handle the job well enough.

Unfortunately, when Crockett took over, the opposite of what I intended to happen took place. It's like the story Lou Thesz tells about Toots Mondt. Toots took over Buddy Rogers' bookings after Rogers got the NWA belt, then wouldn't let any of the other promoters have any dates on him. Jim Crockett did the same thing with Ric Flair. He wanted Flair to be the champion. Once Flair was the champion, Jimmy wouldn't let him out of the territory. That defeated

my whole purpose. I wanted Ric Flair to be the champion because I wanted to get him out of the territory.

Ric Flair and I got out of sorts in the early '90s when I began to get on his case about his matches. I hear people making such a big deal today about what a great worker Flair is. It's obvious they really don't know much about the business. Yes, he was one of the most visible performers, but take a look at any five of his matches. Pick any five you want. Can you tell the difference between match number one, number two, number three, number four, or number five? No! They're all reruns of match number one.

Harley and Flair were a lot alike in that respect. I really liked both of them, but they both only had one match. Harley, however, did a much better job with one match than Flair did, but even he got to a point where it became routine for him. He was no longer thinking about making each

match unique. To some extent, Harley had a good reason for falling into a routine. Since he was going to different territories, he could have the same match and not expose anything. In addition to that, regardless of what town Harley was in, the local promoter didn't want to damage the drawing power of his local star. The promoter would tell Harley, "The guy you're working with is our star performer. We don't want him beat." So Harley would have to wrestle an hour broadway with the local guy. For that effort, Harley might get his 10 percent guarantee, but more often, he was paid $100 to $200. At times he might make more, but he wasn't promised a guaranteed amount. How would you like to travel every night, pay for your hotel, work for an hour or more with a local guy who really didn't know much about wrestling, a guy who wasn't a star anywhere except his hometown ... and be paid $100 to $200. It was easy for me to see that there was a reason why Harley became Harley the robot. He put together a formula match and went through the motions without giving it much thought. I thought Harley

was an incredibly talented performer, but because of those circumstances, he just reached the point where he felt like, "If I have to go an hour, I may as well make it as easy on myself as I can."

On the other hand, I couldn't live with Flair's match. It was just horrible. At least Harley didn't get pushed on his ass by the referee, which Flair always did.

If you watch Flair and say he was one of the greatest workers in history — you're wrong! Did he know how to get by? I'll give him that. To begin with, he had talent which was based primarily on his personality, which was just a little bit different from everyone else. He was very outgoing. He dressed well. He stood out with the thick, blond hair. When he was the champion, he could get by on those features because people weren't as critical as they were in the days when "wrestling" was the attraction.

I remember talking to Bob Dhue one day at the

Omni. As we rode down on the escalator, someone with blonde hair was walking through the crowd. It was Ric Flair. The people were pointing. "Hey, hey, hey! There goes Ric Flair."

"Jeez, the people really like Ric Flair," Bob remarked.

"Too bad they're no longer buying tickets to see him," I said. "Bob, go out tomorrow and bleach your hair. You'll need a little different body for this to really work, but when you walk in, people will get excited and notice you. They figure you must be somebody, even if they don't recognize you, just because you have blond hair. On the other hand, you have to realize that the people won't pay to see just you and your blond hair. They're going to pay to see exciting matches."

I made my decisions based on whether or not a person could draw a crowd and make money. I didn't determine whether a guy was over or not by

the fact that people acknowledged him when he walked down the aisle. I didn't determine whether a guy was over or not just because he was getting a reaction in a closed room from a captive audience. It didn't matter who it was. If a blond-haired guy walked across the arena floor, the people would all be buzzing.

"Hey, who's that?"

"Oh, that's Ric Flair!"

Flair had a way about him that few people had. Just like his name, he had that special flair for showmanship. However, he wasn't necessarily a great worker. He was a good worker. I'll give him that. But did anybody ever look at one of Flair's matches and say, "Boy, that was as good as the match I saw between Dory Funk and Jack Brisco!"? Not a chance! He had some great matches when he worked with Ricky Steamboat. The match Ric had with Steamboat in Nashville, Tennessee, seems to be the one match

that everybody always mentions when they talk about classic matches. Yes, it was a great match, but there were a lot of just plain, bad matches both before and after that.

If anyone saw Ric Flair wrestle more than one time, and didn't come to the realization that he only has one match in his repertoire, they weren't paying very close attention. Every match Flair had was based on his favorite match, and that match wasn't particularly exciting. It might have been to some people, but those were the people who hadn't already seen his shtick a thousand times. They must have missed his every-night routine where he gets pushed onto his ass by the referee. They were probably in the bathroom when he did the upside-down flip into the corner turnbuckle. They were getting a Coke when he made his run along the ring apron. They were talking to their neighbor when he jumped off the top rope and dropped an elbow onto his opponent. If you've never seen those routines, then you've never seen Ric Flair.

I wasn't bothered by the fact that Ric was doing the same high spots in every match. I was bothered by the fact that he did the same high spots in the same sequence in every match. He never mixed them up. Flair would do the same thing at the same point in every match. For instance, I always used a headlock, but I wouldn't follow it with a backdrop, and then follow that with a knee, and then follow that with an elbow — in every match. Once you've seen the same match two or three times, what's left to get excited about?

Ric did a good job in the early years, even though the work he did was very sparing. When I first met Flair, we made him a cousin of the Andersons. He got over immediately, in part due to his association with Gene and me. We had all the heat, so as our "cousin," some of that heat transferred to him. He had a lot of other things going for him as well in those early days. He had a lot of charisma. He carried himself in a special way and he had a great body. Every time his work reached the point where he might expose himself, either Gene or I

would tag in and get him out before he did something to make the people think, What the hell was that? Gene and I went back to the Carolinas to drop the belts to Ric and Greg Valentine. I even did a hospital job for him one time in Charlotte.

As time went on, however, my opinion of Flair changed. He became a different person, or maybe I changed. Whatever .... Ric Flair got to the point where he would do goofy stuff, like ripping his clothes off and standing on camera in his shorts. He saw Gene and me do long broadways — one hour, 90-minutes, two hours — with Paul Jones and Wahoo McDaniel. From that, he got the idea that all you had to do was put in the time and you automatically had a great match. He didn't understand that going for an hour while the people were yawning wasn't the answer. He predicated everything on the idea that more was better. It got to the point where I would send Ronnie West, or another referee, to the ring to tell them to take the match home. I was ready to run in myself to stop the match. There were a lot of people in the

audience who wanted to run in, too. For 30 minutes, people were going, "Damn, is this thing still going on? I thought it would be over by the time I got back from getting a coke and popcorn. Does anybody want anything else?" Of course, Flair couldn't be persuaded of that. He got the impression that it was important to put the time in because he, Flair, thought it made him look like a great worker.

A great worker is someone who can entice more people back to the arena the next time we open the doors. Anybody who knew how to work, anybody who knew how to count the house, knew it wasn't enough to just go for an hour. You had to do something during that hour. I adhered to the standard that when we book someone, people pay to see that person and they pack the building. There's no other gauge. When Gene and I were doing our program with Paul and Wahoo, the houses increased every week, or they were sold out throughout the entire run. That's how we justified the one-hour and two-hour matches. Do

you think we would have come back with a two-hour match if the first hour didn't draw? And why would we come back with a "no-time-limit match" if the two-hour match didn't draw? It did draw, and that's why we were able to come back.

Gene and I were in a match in North Carolina in the late '60s. We were working with George Becker and Johnny Weaver. Becker was booking at the time. The people were jumping up and down, screaming and yelling. When we finished, old man Crockett said he wanted to bring it back the next week. Based on the reaction of the people from the first match, we expected to sell the place out again. We did come back to a decent house, but it was only half full. After I spent some time trying to analyze why that happened, I came to a conclusion. The fact that the people were yelling and screaming that first night really didn't mean anything. What else were the people going to do? They were at the wrestling matches, so they stayed there and did what wrestling fans were expected to do — they screamed and yelled — but

that didn't mean they liked the match well enough to come back the following week. It wasn't a money match that people wanted to pay to see again.

You can see how far we've come from those standards by looking at the last few years before WCW went out of business. There wasn't one person working for WCW who was ever required to demonstrate their ability to draw a house. The guys working for Turner got paid regardless. They got paid regardless! They got paid to show up. Sometimes they didn't show up — and they still got paid. I used to ask The Suits all the time. "Why did you pay this guy that much money?"

I watched Flair and Luger to a point where I wanted to puke. They had their little choreographed routine down pat. That routine worked for Flair when he was the champion because he could do it in Dallas with one of Fritz von Erich's boys. The next night, he could go to

Los Angeles and do it with somebody different. And, of course, nobody in St. Louis knew what had happened in LA, so he could get by with it there, too. But you can't do that night after night after night in the same town. Every time Flair and Luger came to the back after their match, I asked them, "My God, can't you guys do something different for a change? Can't you change things up every now and then?" I've already mentioned that I told Dallas Page the same thing. "You can't just put on the same skit every night. You have to go out there and create a new match." Of course, neither Lex nor Ric appreciated the comments, so they were very outspoken in their criticism. They went right to Jim Herd and complained. "Dammit, Jim! We're the stars, not Ole!"

Jim Herd would come to me and say, "Ole, Ric is the champion."

That brings me to another point. WCW paid Ric Flair around $750,000 because he was the world heavyweight champion. Do you notice anything

strange about the way that last sentence was phrased? I didn't say when he was the world champion. I said "because" he was the world champion. The Suits were so stupid! I used to repeat over and over, "My God, Jim! This business is a work! Flair didn't win the belt. We gave him the belt so he could represent the NWA as champion." That's all there was to it! I tried to explain the same thing to Jim Barnett, but he never could understand what I was talking about. If you got into a discussion with Jim Herd about Ric Flair and the world title, you would think Flair won the belt by beating Frank Gotch, Strangler Lewis, Lou Thesz and Danny Hodge in a shoot.

I remember asking Herd, "Why would you pay him $750,000?"

"Well — because he's the champion."

Remember, this is the same guy who once told me to fire Bobby Eaton because he lost three matches on TV.

I couldn't make Herd understand what I was saying. When I finally realized what they were thinking, I stood up in a meeting and said, "You are the dumbest bastards I've ever known. If I had realized that you people would be so damned stupid as to give the world champion $750,000, just because we made him the world champion, I would have made myself the champion." I couldn't believe that anyone could be that ignorant, but they were. I should have stood up in the meeting and said, "Hey, I'd like to have that belt." I could have come up with all kinds of reasons to put the belt on myself. Looking back on it, now I'm not sure why I didn't. I didn't need a reason. I was the booker. That would have been reason enough.

Flair and Barnett were walking down the hall toward me when we were all working at WCW in 1992. We stopped to shoot the bull for a few minutes, then Barnett said, "Ole, wouldn't you say Flair was one of the top five workers of all time?"

I said, "Hell, no! I wouldn't even put him in the

top fifty," or something along that line. I just said something to get under his skin. Of course, Flair got all riled up, but he would never do anything. I used to have him crying about every five minutes. I would chew him out and he would get all teary-eyed. All Barnett could do was mutter, "Oh, my God," as they walked away.

A few hours later, Barnett came up to me and said, "Oh, my, Ole. You were so cruel."

"Jim," I asked, "can't you remember when he was the champion? We never used him."

"Oh, that's right," he admitted. "He wasn't very good, was he?"

I'm not saying Flair wasn't a good worker. I used to say, "Flair has flair." But my response to Barnett in the hallway in 1992 was predicated on the fact that, from the early '80s on, Flair had settled into a comfortable routine.

There is a flip side to that coin and I used to talk

about it. Jack Brisco was a good worker and drew money. Dory Funk Jr. was a good worker and drew money. However, just because someone was a good worker didn't necessarily mean they could draw money. It would make sense to say that a person would draw money if they were a good worker, but it wasn't necessarily so. There were a lot of wrestlers who were great workers, but they couldn't draw any money. Greg Peterson was considered to be a pretty fair worker. He knew the moves and he knew what to do at the right time, but he couldn't draw his family to the matches.

On the other hand, a guy doesn't necessarily have to be a good worker to draw money. Tex McKenzie drew a lot of money, but he was clumsy and a lousy worker. Sailor Art Thomas drew money, but he wasn't a worker. Dusty Rhodes drew a lot of money, but he wasn't what I would call a good worker. There are a lot of contradictions in the wrestling business that keep you from coming up with an absolute definition of what makes a good worker and what makes a

money maker.

There was a time when most of the wrestlers in the wrestling business had a wrestling background, not a background in the theater, or in vaudeville. They were wrestlers first. In order to be a wrestler who drew money, they had to learn how to be a good worker, which involved the psychology necessary to make a good wrestling match. Verne and Lou were good wrestlers and good workers. You could stand there and watch them — and you thought they were really wrestling. And sometimes, they might have been. That was the sign of a good worker. A good worker is someone who can convince you that what they're doing is real — someone who can make you believe that they're really wrestling ... competitively.

Today, they still call the guys workers. Turn on the television and watch McMahon's show this week. Can you tell me you're convinced that they're wrestling? No. Everybody knows they're

not. So why do they call themselves workers? If you listen to them talk, most of them are convinced that they're good workers. However, they're not doing anything remotely close to wrestling. They're acting, so they should be called actors. For that matter, they're not good actors, either.

Chapter 44
Executive Producer

Maybe it's time that I tried to explain what booking is. Depending on the territory we're talking about, booking could mean different things. I guess everybody knows there were 30 territories in the United States, so there are exceptions, but in my case, booking meant that I had full control over the wrestling talent. I hired them. I fired them. I had a say in everything that pertained to them — who they worked with, what they did in the ring, television, interviews, payoffs.

By the time the '90s rolled around, the talent was considered to be more important than the person doing the booking. During this time, the boys weren't happy with me for several reasons. I didn't tolerate people being late. I didn't tolerate people missing a show. Luger got upset when I refused to make him the world champion. Jim

Herd had a lot of reasons to want me out of there. He got tired of hearing the wrestlers constantly saying, "We're more important than Ole." He got tired of me disagreeing with him. He was upset because I wouldn't kiss his ass ... or anyone's, for that matter. And I got fired ... for the first time ever. That was the end of me — at least for the time being.

I didn't do a whole lot after I was fired. After 20 years in the business, I decided to take some time off. When I went back to WCW in the late spring or early summer of '92, I went to work for Bill Watts. Bill hired me to be a referee and to give him a little help with the book. Jody Hamilton also was helping him and offering ideas. When I reported for work, the first thing Bill said to me was, "I'm running this thing. I don't want any shit out of you."

Bill was always pleasant.

Now that I think about it, Bill and I are a lot alike.

I don’t know why Bill would even begin to think that he would have trouble from me, but I said, "I’ve got no problem with that. I’ll do whatever you want me to do." In all reality, I never had a problem with anybody running it. As long as they knew how to do it, I didn’t care.

Bill went on to say, "You won’t like the pay."

"How much do you want to pay me?"

"I’ll give you a hundred thousand," he offered.

I didn’t say anything to Bill Watts about it, but I would have gone to work for nothing. Well, let me rephrase that. If they had covered my expenses, paid for my gas to and from work, and bought my meal at lunchtime — I would have done it. And I would have. I just wanted to be around the business. I enjoyed being around the guys. Well, at least I did to some degree. I primarily wanted to teach the new kids how to work. I would have trained those kids for nothing. I would have been

as happy as a pig in slop. I just enjoyed being around the kids, and working out, and teaching them about wrestling, and even more important, teaching them the psychology of wrestling.

No, the money wasn't that important to me, but how could I turn that down? They were going to pay me $100,000 a year. They were paying all my transportation. They were paying all my hotel bills. They were even paying for my food on the road. Every time I went to TV, they fed me. Not only that, but I didn't have to make any big decisions. I was a referee! And I didn't referee very often.

At that point, we were all on a booking committee. Bill would hold once-a-week meetings, which is the way I was told he did it in Oklahoma. We would have group booking sessions with Dusty, Watts, Jody Hamilton, Grizzly Smith, and myself. I had never booked like that before. I always did everything myself. Dusty would give a short report of what he wanted to

do. Bill would say, "Okay, we'll do this, but not that. What do you think, Jody?" For the most part, we were all given assignments. "I want you to come up with some ideas for TV."

I would come up with ideas now and then, but most of the time, I would act like a kid who hadn't done his homework. Bill would ask me, "Do you have any ideas?"

I would give him a quick, "No."

He would say, "Hell, I know better than that."

"Bill, you hired me to be a referee. I'm trying to be a referee."

Bill's main reason for hiring me was to put some credibility back into the referees, so he made me the head referee. Bill was of the opinion that the referees should be obeyed. He wanted to put some authority back with the referees, instead of them being completely blind to everything that was going on in the ring. I couldn't have agreed with

him more. As it was, the referees were looked at as clowns, even to the point of helping the bad guys in some cases. I was totally shocked when I saw one of the referees hand someone a chair to use on their opponent. I couldn't believe it when I saw that. Bill wanted the rules enforced. If someone was outside the ring, and the referee counted to ten, they were disqualified. When the referee told them to break, he wanted the guys to break. It had also become a normal thing for the boys to get their heat at the referee's expense, but that was only because they didn't know how to get heat any other way. They had no frame of reference because they had never been around the business before the '90s. They just thought that was the way it was supposed to be done. They had no way of knowing how to get heat, and there wasn't anyone left who knew enough to tell them any different. That's why Bill brought me into the picture. I did an interview on television that went something like, "During the years that I wrestled, I pulled a lot of dirty stuff on referees, and I used to get away with it. Now that I've been appointed the

head referee, I will guarantee you that nobody is going to get away with the stuff that I got away with." I was the tough guy who was going to put the starch back into the referees. The wrestlers were supposed to know that whenever they were in the ring, I would be watching, and they might find themselves in deep trouble.

I don't think I refereed more than four or five times. I worked on other projects, such as the 30-minute segments that preceded the Pay-Per-View shows. At first, I didn't like doing those segments, but after awhile, I just gave up and went along with the program. Then Bill Watts assigned the job of editing the TV shows to me. I ran through the weekly tapes and marked segments that needed to be removed. That's what I was doing when Bill got canned.

Bill Watts got fired during the first couple of months of 1993. Bill was always being Bill. He stepped on a lot of toes. Bill would wear what Bill wanted to wear. Bill would act the way Bill

wanted to act. Bill wasn't above putting his legs up on the desk and farting, just to see what your reaction would be, or farting and not paying any attention to what your reaction was. Bill just didn't care. But the problem was, we worked for The Suits, who couldn't understand Bill's way of doing business. Bill would tell people what he was thinking, which didn't get over with The Suits.

For the most part, Watts ran a tight ship, but one of his biggest drawbacks was that he ridiculed the head boss, who was Bill Shaw at that point. Bill Shaw knew as much about wrestling as my former boss, Jim Herd. Watts was always prone to make comments, much like I was, but he made comments about Shaw on occasion that were very offensive to Shaw. One time, when we walked into Shaw's office, Watts poked me in the ribs and said, "Can you imagine this skinny, little runt being a wrestler at one time?" I realized that it was the wrong thing for Bill to say, but I couldn't keep the smirk off my face. Of course, Shaw didn't respond to the taunt. He just sat there. Most of the time, Bill

Shaw didn't say anything — but I'll guarantee you one thing. Bill Shaw marked it down.

Eventually, Bill Watts disappeared from the scene. He quit ... or he got fired ... I don't know. He was just gone.

In 2000, Bill Busch invited me down to TBS to interview me for a job. Bill Busch was running the company at the time since Eric Bischoff had been demoted. After we talked for almost an hour, he asked, "Would you like to be an agent for $60,000 a year?"

My answer was, "No." I wasn't interested in doing that. Later that day, I wandered over to the gym and saw Paul Orndorff. Paul said, "I just talked to a friend of yours."

"Oh, yeah?," I asked. "Who's that?"

"Bill Watts."

"Is that right? Where did you see him?"

"He just called. He's in town."

"Do you have his phone number?" I asked.

"Yeah. Why don't we give him a call."

Paul called Bill and talked for a few minutes. The next thing you know, a weird look came over Paul's face and he handed me the phone. I said, "Hey, Bill! How are you doing?"

Bill cussed me out and threatened to kick my ass.

Again.

Then Bill told me, "I was gonna quit anyway, but I didn't appreciate you getting me fired." For some reason, Watts had come to that conclusion.

I told him, "If I was so smart and had enough clout to convince them to fire you, why wasn't I promoted to your job and given a raise in pay from what you gave me? And if I'm the one who got you fired, why did Eric Bischoff get your job and then

fire me?"

I think we've cleared that up since, but I don't know for sure. Bill is, and always will be, Bill.

Bill was smart and a credit to the business. How good was he? I don't know, but I do know that he tried to run the book for Barnett on at least two occasions. It didn't work well when they first started promoting against Ann Gunkel back in 1974. It didn't work out for Bill when he took my place in 1980, either. But then again, he had his own territory — Oklahoma — to run. He lasted less than five months, from mid-January to May, before Barnett called me and said, "Oh, Ole. Are you ready to come back?" According to Jody Hamilton, Bill liked to get a lot of input from the boys before he made a decision. Jody told me that Bill used to have meetings with Ernie Ladd and Ken Mantell when he was promoting Louisiana. They would have a round robin and discuss the booking arrangements. Bill listened to their input, then made a decision on which

direction to go.

But I'm getting ahead of myself. After they got rid of Bill Watts, Bob Dhue told me that Bill Watts' position had been eliminated and they were replacing it with something called an Executive Producer. Bob Dhue asked me if I wanted to be the Executive Producer. I didn't know what an Executive Producer was. In fact, I couldn't find anybody in the company who could tell me what the job description of an Executive Producer was. There was hardly any discussion at all after that. My next question was, who has the most authority — the booker or the Executive Producer? I was told the Executive Producer did.

In all my years in wrestling, I had never known of anybody with the title of Executive Producer. Booker? I knew what that was. Executive Producer? I didn't have a clue. One thing I did know — an Executive Producer didn't, or couldn't, do the same job as a booker because The Suits didn't understand what a

booker did.

"What is a booker?"

"He puts the matches together."

"Oh. Well, anybody can do that. Wrestling is all a show, so how hard can it be? You just put two names together. Okay, let's see. We have 25 guys, so we just pair them off, two-by-two. That means one guy gets the night off. Why don't we ask around and see who would like to have a night off?"

That's exactly what The Suits thought, as well as all the employees at TBS. In everyones' mind, the booker was just an employee who didn't play any significant role in the wrestling business. The booker used to be the highest-paid guy in the territory. All of a sudden, everything was topsy-turvy. The wrestlers were running the company. We're back to the same old story, which is what I've been leading up to. The new powers

in wrestling had no idea what wrestling involved. They thought it just consisted of putting any two guys in the ring, or four guys in the ring, or six guys in the ring. You could just do whatever you wanted to do. After all, it's all a show, right? What do you have to know to put on a show?

Once again, I wasted good oxygen by trying to explain it to them. "Do you believe movies are real?"

"Why, no. They're all fake. We know that."

"That's right! Now, can anybody make a movie?"

"Well-llll ... uh, no."

"Can anybody be a star in a movie?"

"Well ... no."

"Does every movie make money?"

"Uh ... no."

"You're right!" I concluded. "Wrestling can't be done that way, either. It's more than just having somebody pretend to be a wrestler. It's more than just having somebody pretend to wrestle."

Once again, The Suits could never make the connection, but they assured me that we would all sit down to determine what my job as the Executive Producer would entail. We never did. We were going to discuss the ladder and what the pecking order was. We never did. I could never get anyone to sit down to talk about those things. I finally told Bob Dhue, "If you're willing to pay me, I'll do anything you want me to do." I wasn't going to bust my chops as the booker or executive producer for what they were paying me. I would have refereed for a lot less, but I wasn't going to do all that for what they were paying me. Unfortunately, he never would sit down to discuss it.

The subject was never brought up again. Officially, Dusty was still the booker. Dusty and I spent four days trying to rework everything that he had booked, most of which was a mess. Of course, maybe it was even more of a mess when we finished. The truth is, he was out of his league. The job was just more than he could handle. He would just write names down. As far as I could tell, that was all he had ever done. He would go home, watch an old movie, then sit down and think of a way to adapt what he saw into an angle.

I'm not saying it was all bad. Dusty did some things that were good, and some things that were great, but there was so much stuff he did that was way off the charts — more show business than wrestling.

Chapter 45
Spending Ted's Money

I realized that the times had changed, but I got into wrestling during a time when the guys worked for very little money. I'm not saying that was good because you often worked for little or nothing. In those days, though, it was just a given that if you wanted to be a wrestler, you had to do whatever the promoters wanted you to do and accept whatever they paid you. If they told you to drive the 500 miles from Minneapolis to Winnipeg in the dead of winter when the temperature was 40 below, for 50 bucks, you only had two choices. You either did it or you didn't. But you have to understand. What was the minimum wage then? $1.50 an hour? Maybe. I know that when I was in the service, I was only making $148 a month. A month! Not a week, but a month.

In the '60s, professional football might have paid

$6,000 to $8,000 a year. If I did a good job as a lineman, I might make $10,000. Verne played football, and so did Dick "The Bruiser" Afflis — for something less than $2,000 a year in the late ‘40s and early ‘50s. And in those days, the players provided their own jock strap and shoes.

Hard Boiled Haggerty told me that he earned less than $2,000 in his first year of playing NFL football. He said, "I played football, but I was too early. I didn’t make much money. Today, players get millions of dollars just to sign their name. Then I got into professional wrestling — but again — I was too early. I didn’t make much money. Today, the wrestlers are making hundreds of thousands of dollars, and they don’t even know how to wrestle. Then I got into the movies. I was paid $20,000 to do Paint Your Wagon. I thought that was a fortune. Nowadays, kids make millions of dollars and the movies are the shits. Again, I was too early. After having done all that — football, wrestling, and the movies — I was always too early ... and now it’s too

late." Haggerty was wise with his investments, though. He put his money into real estate and apartment buildings in Southern California, so I think he's done well.

Verne got into wrestling in 1949. By 1953, he made more than $100,000. Leo Garibaldi told me that when they were in Los Angeles back in the '50s, they were knocking down roughly $1,500 a week. They were making enough money to buy a new Cadillac every week. Of course, that was when the government had its own gimmick working. If you made $100,000 in those days, the top tax bracket was 90-percent. So even though some of the wrestlers were earning big money, they weren't bringing a large portion of it home.

Before Jimmy Crockett and Ted Turner took over, I tried to make payoffs that I thought were fair. If I got mad at someone, he might get a little less. If a guy screwed up, I might fine him. In that situation, however, I always made sure that they understood what the screw-up was. "Hey, you screwed up

here. You screwed up there. You missed this. You missed that. Screw up again ... and you're fired!"

I probably fined Khosrow Vaziri, the Iron Sheik, more times than anyone else, but that was more of a joke than anything. The only thing is, the joke always stuck. I never gave the fine back to him. It was like a rib on the square. If he did something stupid, I would say, "You did so-and-so. That'll cost you fifty bucks."

He would cry, "Ohhh, who told?"

Khoz used to massage my neck on occasion. He would be standing behind me, of course, and the rest of the guys were in front of me. I couldn't see Khoz, so he would take one hand away and give me the finger, or make another rude gesture behind my back. Of course, Bob Roop was there most of the time. Bob would give me the iggy, or give me a look, or whatever, so I knew that Khosrow had done something. I didn't know what he did, but I

didn't have to know. I just said, "Okay, Khoz. That just cost you fifty bucks."

He would cry, "Ohhh, my God! Who stooged on the Iron Sheik?" Later on that night, he would go to Bob. "Hey, Bob. Maybe you can go talk to Ole and get my $50 back." Of course, Bob would talk to me and we would laugh about it. I never returned the 50 bucks to Khoz.

During the '70s, the top guys in Georgia made something like $1,400 to $1,500 a week when the towns were doing fairly decent business. When I was booking Georgia, it was easy enough make $300 in Augusta and $300 in Macon. It was very easy to make $400 in Columbus, so by Wednesday, you already had a $1,000 week. Thursday was basically the shits, especially if you were in Rome. If you were on top, Rome was a $100 payoff, maybe $125. The alternatives on Thursday were Albany and Athens. The payoff for Albany was in the same range as Rome, $100 or less. In Athens, you might make $100 if it was sold out,

possibly $150, but generally speaking, the payoff was usually $75. On Friday night in Atlanta, you could make $500 or more. If the show was in the Omni, you could do $1,000. Saturday night was Carrollton, where you're back to making $125 to $150. Sunday was Marietta. Marietta could be anywhere between $150 and $250. When you add those figures up, you're looking at a $2,000 week or better. That's why Hansen was able to make $100,000 in twelve months. That's also why Barnett was able to guarantee Piper $3,000 a week. We were doing good business.

The underneath guys didn't make that much, but they still did well. Augusta usually sold out, or came really close to a sellout, which was in the range of $10,000 to $12,000. The seating in that building was somewhere around 3,500 people. Depending on what year we're talking about, the ringside tickets were $3.00 to $3.50. Later on, I believe we went up to $4.00 and $4.50. General admission went from $2.00 to $3.00. If you use an average between $3.50 and

$4.00, you have to figure the house somewhere around $12,000. That's what the house was supposed to be, but that amount never made its way back to the office. I never knew how much was being taken and I couldn't get anyone to tell me, but $1,000 to $2,000 always disappeared before it reached the office. Charlie Harben, who was actually running the town, wasn't going to blow the whistle because he wasn't going to risk losing his job. It's hard to say exactly what went on, but based on that $12,000 house, the guys underneath would pick up $125, maybe $150.

In Macon, the figures would be about the same. It was pretty easy to do $12,000. It was harder to do $15,000, but we did have times when we would run as high as $18,000 to $20,000. The guys would make about the same as in Augusta. If Macon did $12,000, then 25 to 30 percent made it to the Atlanta office. After Barnett took his booking fee, the remainder was split among twelve to fourteen guys. In the first match, a wrestler would still make a hundred bucks. Columbus was

a little better. The seating in Columbus was a little more than 5,000 and we were doing a lot of $15,000 houses there. The guy underneath could make another $125, possibly $175. It just depended on the guy and a lot of variables. So professional wrestling gave underneath talent an opportunity to pick up $500 to $750 a week. That was $25,000 to $37,000 a year, and nobody was an All-Pro.

Our method for paying the guys for TV was simple. The payoff was a flat 25 bucks. In some territories, if you wrestled on TV and you won your match, you didn't get anything. You only got paid if you did a job. In Atlanta, every time you worked on TV, you were paid 25 bucks. If one of the underneath guys needed some money and was coming in for a few days, I would book him for the weekend. On a typical Saturday, he could work twice on the Atlanta TV and once on Columbus TV. That was $75 in the bag right out of the chute. I would book him in Carrollton that night, which was usually another $75. You had to work

four times, but you were in the first, second, or third match. There weren't too many part-time jobs that paid $150 for one days work. When we started running Marietta, you could pick up another $75 or more on Sunday, which brought your total for Saturday and Sunday to $225. Not too bad for a part-time job on the weekend — and you were close to home.

People talk about the psychology we used in the ring. What most promoters never thought about was the psychology of making payoffs. I first tumbled to that concept when I wrestled for Eddie Graham in Florida. What I knew of Eddie Graham as a person, I liked. What I knew of him as far as how he ran the business, I liked. Was he screwing the guys on their payoff? Maybe. But Florida also had lots of wrestlers on each card. That made payoffs difficult. I was there on a $500 a week guarantee, which wasn't a great deal of money, but it was $500 guaranteed. I don't know of anybody at that time who was on a deal like that. Very few people got a guarantee of any kind. But Eddie had

a way of handling payoffs that was unique. I later shared Eddie's idea with Verne because Verne had his own method of making payoffs.

Verne would book a flight and send the guys out to Omaha, Denver, or San Francisco. He would give them a $500 payoff, but then he would charge them $200 for transportation, so they would end up with $300. I talked to Verne one day and suggested that he use Eddie Graham's method of paying the guys. "Look at it this way, Verne. If you start them out with $500, then you deduct $200 for trans, they think they're getting screwed out of 200 bucks. Reverse it. Give the guys a $250 payoff, then tell them you're going to cover their transportation. Then hand them a $50 bonus. Tell them the bonus is for doing such a good job. They still end up with $300. It's the same amount, but nothing is being taken out, and they're getting the trans for free. Everything is a plus, plus, plus. There are no negatives in it."

That's what Eddie Graham did to me, and I

recognized it. Eddie would pay you $80. However, since you had done such a good job, he would give you a bonus of $30. That's where I was so different from so many people. Nobody thought enough about it to see what was really happening. When the other guys opened their pay envelope and saw the bonus of $30, all they could do was think, Holy balls. That Eddie must think a lot of me. When I opened the envelope and saw the $30, I immediately thought, What a clever thing to do. I recognized it right off. It made all the sense in the world. I thought, Eddie is a smart guy. Did I agree with the payoff? No! I thought I should have made 175 bucks for the night. He only gave me 90 plus 30. Psychologically, though, I thought it was a clever idea. And that's what I told Verne. Paying the boys is never easy, but Eddie paid them in such a way that they thought they were getting a bonus. How many guys ever understood that, or even took the time to think about it? Most of them never did. They were oblivious to it.

It was a great idea, but I never used the Eddie Graham method as an incentive. I simply said, "Here's where we are," and I would pay the guys the amount I thought they deserved based on the house. Generally speaking, we used to pay somewhere in the range of 35 to 40 percent. Sometimes, if a guy had done a great job and worked really hard, I might give him an extra 50 bucks at the end of the week. You would have to ask the guys whether or not they thought I paid fairly, but I can tell you what Stan Hansen once told me: "This is the first time in my life that I ever made $100,000. I've been to New York and a lot of different territories, but to make $100,000 in that little territory in Georgia, where the trips are short and you're home every night — that's pretty good." And it was! You had no expenses. That was $100,000 in your pocket. Contrast that to making $90,000 in Minneapolis. That still wasn't bad because you only worked 15 to 18 days in a month, but you had some long trips. You would drive 500 miles one way to Winnipeg, or 450 miles to Chicago. Peoria was 375 miles. In

Georgia, we didn't have any trips that amounted to much. Albany was the worst, and that was only 180 miles. Savannah was a long trip, but we didn't go there after Barnett sold the town to Crockett in the mid-70s. Monday was Augusta, which was 140 miles. Tuesday was Macon, 80 miles. Wednesday was Columbus, which was only 96 miles. Rome was usually on Thursday, another 70 miles. Friday was Atlanta, where we lived. We were right there in Atlanta for TV on Saturday, then we drove down for the Columbus TV. On the way home that night, you hit either Griffin or Carrollton. You would have a 50-mile trip back home after you finished wrestling that night.

When I worked for Jim Herd, the payroll for the wrestlers alone was in the $10 million range. Herd took me aside one day and asked for my ideas on where he could cut the budget. Within 20 minutes, I had a plan laid out to save him around $3 million. The wrestlers were making a lot of money, and there were a lot of guys I

couldn't cut because their contracts weren't renewable in the immediate future. There were a few people, though, whose contracts were schedule to be renewed that month, so there was room for adjustments. When I handed my proposal to Herd, he looked at it and said, "Jeez! Do you know how this is gonna make me look?"

"What are you talking about!" I asked.

"I've been running this for a couple of years," he shot back, "and you come back in less than an hour with a $3 million cut to the payroll. It's gonna make me look a little stupid."

All I could think of to say was, "Well, when did anyone ever credit you with knowing anything about this business." I was just speaking the way I felt.

Herd's next statement proved my point. "I'll tell you what. Just find a way to cut the budget by $100,000. That will make it look like we're trying

to cut costs and it will keep the company accountants happy. Next year, we'll cut $125,000, and it will look like we're really trying to cut costs."

He just didn't believe that things could be done my way. I said, "That's like picking a gnat off of an elephant's ass. If you really want to cut the budget, you have the answer right there on your desk."

You can name just about any wrestler around during the '70s and '80s, and there's a good chance that he worked for me at one time or another, either when I booked Charlotte or when I booked Atlanta. When I was running Atlanta, I booked almost everybody in the country. My point is, I knew how to pay people. I had been doing it for years. The only thing The Suits knew was how to give away the keys to the house. They didn't take my advice. I heard that by the time they went out of business in 2001, the payroll had climbed to more than $35 million.

Bill Shaw, who was the top boss when Bill Watts hired me in '92, had the same mentality, or lack of it, that Jim Herd had. They both knew that wrestling was a work, but they insisted on paying hundreds of thousands of dollars to people like Ric Flair because he was the champion. I went over and over it, time and time again. "Bill, we tell these guys who the champion is going to be. I walk up to them and say, 'Okay, you're the champion.' That's all there is to it. Does that mean the guy suddenly deserves a huge amount of money?" No matter how many times I explained it, they just couldn't grasp the concept.

Johnny B Badd was a good example. Marc Mero. He was just starting, but he looked good and had a great attitude, so I asked him to stop by my office so we could discuss the details of his contract. I didn't want to be so tight-fisted that I would ask him to work for nothing, although that's the way I would have done it in the old days. I would have told him right up front, "This is the way we do things. You'll be paid based on your

performance. If you do well, you'll make a lot of money. If you don't do well, I'm going to fire you." I never offered a salary or guarantee of any kind. The manner in which we did business had changed, however, so I offered him $50,000 a year to start. It was enough to live on. It was enough to be somewhat comfortable. I said, "If you get over and you do well, we'll talk about another contract. Do you want it or not?"

"Oh, yeah!" he quickly agreed. The most Johnny had ever made in his life at that point was $17,000, so he was absolutely thrilled to be offered $50,000. One thousand dollars a week? That's not too bad for a professional wrestler. Or a professional anybody. That was guaranteed money, which was something nobody got when I started. Before we could sign any of the paperwork, Bill Shaw's secretary called to tell me that Shaw wanted Marc Mero and me to be in his office that next afternoon. Shaw was going to present a contract to Johnny. Before I could tell her that I already had a handshake deal for

$50,000, she said, "We expect you here at two p.m. tomorrow." She hung up before I could finish saying, "Fine, we'll be there."

I called Johnny back and told him, "Tomorrow, we have to be in Bill Shaw's office at two o'clock. He's going to make you a deal. Just keep your mouth shut and listen to what he has to say." I wanted to see what Shaw would do, so I was going to let him do all the talking.

The next day, we met in Shaw's office. Johnny and I both sat down. Bill Shaw, being the big, important guy that he is, said, "Johnny, I'm going to make you one offer, and one offer only. I don't want you consulting with your attorney, your accountant, or anybody else. I want you to make a decision and I want you to make it now. This is our offer. We'll give you $275,000 a year. We'll also give you a $75,000 clothing allowance and pay your trans. And that's it. I need your answer and I need it now."

Johnny almost fell out of his chair. I was getting used to the ridiculous things they did, so when Johnny looked over at me, I didn't miss a beat. "Johnny, ya heard what Bill said. We don't wanna talk to your attorneys. We don't wanna talk to your accountants. We don't wanna talk to any financial advisors. You need to make up your mind right now. Take it or leave it."

Johnny was so stunned that he could barely speak. "Okay, I'll take it."

After Johnny left, Bill Shaw stood up, came over to me, and said, "Now, Ole. Now do you see how it's done?"

I didn't say a word about the $50,000 that Johnny had agreed to the day before. I simply said, "I sure do. I don't think Johnny ever dreamed you'd drive such a hard bargain."

Bill went on to say, "Now, we have an important contract that we need to put together for Leon

White. You handle it. Do whatever you have to do to get him signed."

Leon was wrestling as Van Vader. He and I both went to school at the University of Colorado. I went there long before he did, but when I was in charge and he felt like he had to suck up to me, he would say, "You know, us Colorado alumni have to stick together." I already had a deal with Leon. He worked for $600 per match. I made that deal when I was still able to keep costs down to a reasonable level. Leon could work just 20 shows a year and make twelve grand. If he really wanted to push it and work a lot, say 30 shows, he would make $18,000. That's not too bad for working part-time. I called Leon in Colorado and we made small-talk for a few minutes. I finally said, "I need to meet with you as soon as possible."

"What's the deal?" he asked.

"I'm gonna give you $2.25 million," I answered.

He thought I was joking. "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah."

"I'm dead serious," I assured him. "You're going to get a contract for $2.25 million for three years. I'm an agent for the company, so if we both sign it, they'll probably have to honor it." And that was exactly what we did. The contract was for something around $700,000 a year. Leon signed it and the contract was sent upstairs for final approval.

Later that day, Shaw called me into his office. At the very least, I thought Shaw would be a little upset. As I walked in, he had a silly grin on his face. "Good job," he applauded. He was actually clapping his hands together. "Now you're learning."

I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it! I could not believe it! I gave Vader $600 every time he wrestled. Shaw gave him $2.25 million without even negotiating a contract. He didn't so much as

question it. I thought Shaw was going to chew me out. Instead, he said, "Now you're learning."

The Suits working for TBS had no problem spending Turner's money — and Shaw was no exception. How long do you think it took before every other wrestler in the company knew that Van Vader was making $2.25 million? All of five seconds. Leon would tell you if you didn't ask. How long do you think it took before every other wrestler in the company got the idea that they were worth that kind of money? All of ten seconds.

The year before WCW hired me, Ricky Steamboat made something like $300,000. When Ricky and I sat down to work on his contract, I looked at the figures from the previous year. I said, "Ricky, that's a lot of money. I'll still make you a gift, but I have to cut it to somewhere around 200 grand." I don't remember the exact figures I gave him, but he wasn't at all happy. So what did he do? He called Bill Shaw. Shaw had his

secretary call to tell me that Ricky Steamboat was very upset over the offer I made to him.

"We want Ricky to be happy."

Shaw stopped by my office that afternoon to find out if I had made another deal with Ricky. I said, "Yeah, no problem." That wasn't true, but I wanted to raise his blood pressure a bit.

"What did the two of you decide?" he asked.

I inflated the original figure and said something like, "$600,000."

Shaw was taken aback by my matter-of-fact statement. He stammered a little bit, then managed to whisper, "I didn't mean ..."

I stuck the knife in and gave it a good twist. "Yeah, Bill. That is a little high, but at least he's happy."

I was never a part of Ricky's final contract. Once

again, my days were numbered.

It was my understanding that the person who completed Ricky's contract, along with that of the Nasty Boys, and everyone else, was Eric Bischoff. Did Ricky get the $600,000? I don't know. I hope he did.

Kevin Nash was a really nice kid when I first met him. He worked underneath in WCW and wasn't making much more than a living, if that. In June 1993, Vince brought Kevin into the WWF and changed his name to Diesel. Overnight, Kevin became a star. I was told that when Kevin left the WWF in 1996, WCW offered him $750,000. When Kevin told The Suits at WCW that he couldn't work for that, they increased the offer to more than $1 million. I'm not sure of the exact amount, but I was told that even Kevin was flabbergasted by their second offer. But that was the way the company was being run.

WCW began to offer guaranteed contracts to

everybody. The wrestlers who were on TV with any kind of regularity were all under some kind of a contract. The guys who came in to do jobs on TV weren't, but even they were getting fairly decent money. However, to give a $150,000 contract to the guy in the first match? Come on! What kind of sense does that make? In 1999, two years before WCW went out of business, Dean Malenko and Chris Benoit were each given three-year contracts for $1.35 million dollars. One year later, they quit WCW because they felt they weren't being treated properly. Well, geez! I can't think of anything you could have done to me to make me give up that kind of money.

The guys underneath were making $200,000 to $300,000. How bad is that? What's the base salary for a pro football player? $150,000? $200,000? The guys at the bottom of the wrestling ladder were making more than most mainstream professional athletes. Not only that, but they were only required to show up ten to twelve times a month. How bad can that

be? And in fact, sometimes, they didn't even show up.

Regardless of who I worked for, when I was making the payoffs, I wasn't interested in wasting anybody's money. I definitely wasn't going to waste Ted Turner's money. My objective in business was to make money for the people that I was working for. It wasn't for purely altruistic reasons. I wanted them to make money so Ole Anderson could continue to make money. The guys, however, developed an attitude that they should be paid tremendous salaries, not because they were making money for Ted Turner, but because they were so talented — because they were stars. That was in spite of the fact that Ted Turner was losing millions of dollars. I'm sure Ted wasn't happy about losing millions of dollars. World Championship Wrestling doesn't even exist today, so that's a good indication that what I've been saying has some validity to it.

Chapter 46
No Work, All Play

By 1993, the attitude of the guys had really changed for the worse. There was a time when everybody understood that they were expected to show up for work. If they didn't show up, they didn't get paid. If they didn't show up twice, they might not have a job. Under the Turner regime, especially in the last ten years or so, the talent had contracts which gave them fantastic amounts of money, and they didn't have to do much of anything.

I was sent on the tour of Europe in October 1993. That was right after Arn Anderson and Sid Vicious got into their fracas in Blackburn, England. Sid stabbed Arn approximately 20 times with a pair of scissors. I wasn't there when the incident took place, but I was there the following day.

That place was such a zoo. Everybody was stooging and reporting to Eric Bischoff, who was in charge at that time. I went to the hotels and rode on the bus, but I only showed my authority one time. The bus was supposed to leave at four o'clock. When one of the guys wasn't there at ten minutes past the hour, I said, "Let's go." That really ticked off the stars — and everyone thought they were stars.

Virtually none of the guys wanted me there because I didn't tolerate their bullshit. They didn't want me there because I thought they were being paid more money than they were worth. They didn't want me there because I criticized their matches. I know Flair didn't like my criticism. He had a horrible match in Germany, and he knew it, so on the following night, he told me, "Watch my match tonight." He was wrestling Ricky Steamboat in an arena that was packed. I don't know what Ric wanted me to watch. The match was horrible. The people were sitting on their hands. If you had farted, the people on the other

side of the arena would have heard it. I give Flair credit for at least realizing that the match was bad. He didn't come back and ask, "What do you think?" He knew what I thought.

One afternoon in 1993, we had a meeting at Center Stage with the wrestlers. I said, "Listen, you guys are only wrestling three or four days a week. If you're booked somewhere, you need to be there and you need to be there on time. If you can't do that, perhaps you need to go work for someone else." Later that day, Bill Shaw took me aside and said, "You can't work the talent that hard."

I said to Shaw, "Are you nuts, Bill? NFL football players practice hard for four days and play on the fifth. These guys don't practice at all. They only play. And that's one of the reasons they can't play worth a damn. They don't ever practice. They just play — and they only play four or five times a week. Why is it not logical to expect people to do the job they're being paid to do?"

Not too long after that, Shaw came to me and asked for my input because all the guys were griping. He didn't know how to handle the talent. The guys were complaining because they were working three to five times a week. Each week, we were running four or five house shows and television. To them, it was too much. I used to work ten to twelve times a week. I worked 1-hour broadways, 90-minute broadways, 2-hour broadways, two-and-a-half-hour broadways. Those guys didn't have to work matches that were more than ten minutes long, and they were still getting blown-up and tired.

I don't know why Shaw even asked for my input because he went right over my head and tried to placate the boys. "I understand you guys are tired," he explained. "I realize you had to drive a hundred miles ..."

A hundred? I used to drive 2,000, even 3,000 miles a week. There were times when we didn't have time to rent a motel room. What little sleep

we got was in the seat of the car. Those guys had their hotel paid and their rental cars taken care of. They were flying to any show that was more than 300 miles away — and the office was paying for their airfare. They got their meals catered in when they went to TV. Management made it so ridiculously easy for those guys and made them feel like they were so important. And yet, even with all the perks, the wrestlers were never under the gun to draw money. I wanted to tie the salaries to the ratings, the performance of the houses, and the Pay Per Views. If the Pay Per View makes money for the company — good! We pay the guys more. If the TV ratings go up, we pay the guys more. If attendance at the house shows increases, we pay the guys more. But — if the shows don't make money for the company, we don't increase the pay for the guys. Bill Shaw told me that it was an impractical idea. "Why is that not a reasonable expectation?" I asked.

"I don't know," he conceded, "but it doesn't sound like a good idea."

Shaw never made an attempt to justify the salaries by implementing any of my ideas. Once again, he couldn't understand the concept. You can blame the guys all day long for their lousy attitudes and bad work ethic. I hear that from people all the time. Yes, they were ultimately responsible, but it was people like Bill Shaw who encouraged that attitude.

If the incident where I fired Paul Orndorff, back in the early '80s, had taken place when I was with TBS, or had anyone else done that when Turner owned the company, The Suits never would have let it happen. The people at TBS thought they were dealing with NFL football players, or NBA basketball players, or movie stars. It was just amazing to me.

People ask me all the time. Why wouldn't John Smith do what he was expected to do? Why didn't Joe Blow show up for the show in Atlanta? When did everyone's attitude go to hell? I'll tell you when those problems began. They began in the

‘80s, due in part to drug use, but they really came into vogue in 1988 when Turner took over because none of The Suits knew anything about running the wrestling business. They didn’t know how to handle the talent, either. They looked at the wrestlers as stars. The problems just multiplied and mushroomed as time went on. The wrestlers developed an attitude of self-importance. The old guys weren’t like that at all. Most of the old guys knew they had to work hard because someone was going to be watching them. Someone was going to criticize them. Someone might say, "We don’t need that guy. Fire him." You could get fired immediately, without any notice. Plus, the old-timers knew that they had to draw wrestling fans. No fans, no pay, no job.

When The Suits were running the company, nobody was expected to draw any money. The boys all knew they were going to get their paycheck at the end of the week. If they showed up, they were going to get a paycheck. If they didn’t show up, they were going to get a

paycheck. If they showed up and did a lousy job, they were going to get a paycheck. It didn't matter what they did. If they walked into an arena and only 30 people paid to get in, they still got their $500,000. I heard one of the boys laugh and use the term "mailbox money" a few years ago. He was alluding to the fact that they could sit at home and do nothing, and still have their paycheck mailed to them. No matter how you cut it, they were going to get a paycheck. There was absolutely no incentive whatsoever for anyone to make an effort.

The wrestling business will continue to spiral downwards until and unless the guys find themselves in a position where they're responsible for doing whatever is necessary to be paid for what they do. As I said earlier, I believe Vince McMahon had a different outlook on managing the business than Turner's people did. I might not agree with a lot of the things that Vince does, but at least he tried to keep some modicum of control over the wrestlers in the WWF. To some extent, I

think he was reasonably successful. I never talked to him about it, but my understanding is that he kept a closer watch on everything. If Vince wasn't making money, he wouldn't have paid those guys a dime. The Suits, on the other hand, just accepted whatever the boys did because they were stars. They might as well have just lined the boys up in single file and walked down the line. "Okay, you're a star. You get $400,000. You're a star. You get $300,000." In reality, that's pretty close to what they did. Yet not one of the wrestlers in that line had the first match to prove whether they could even work, let alone draw money.

Lex Luger, the gutless wonder, made a comment to me one night, "You were the dummy for working for $25. I never would have done that."

I was so mad! "You ignorant moron," I said to him. "If I had the attitude back then that you guys have now, you never would have had the opportunity to even be in the business. I would

have killed wrestling back in 1967, just like you're killing it today in 1990." None of them could understand that and they didn't care to understand it. Of course, they didn't have to because The Suits would send them money without expecting them to do anything in return. Perhaps it's been a little bit of an eye-opener now that WCW has closed down.

I can only hope that Vince McMahon is now paying them what they are worth. In other words, according to what they draw — the TV ratings, the pay-per-view, the house shows.

Chapter 47
Jim Barnett, Jr.

When Bill Watts left WCW in 1993, I never dreamed that I would soon be walking out the door right behind him. I didn't know it at the time, but there was a nonentity in the company who was up to some skullduggery behind the scenes — Eric Bischoff. Bischoff is a good example of someone who didn't know much about the wrestling business, yet he was elevated to a position of power, while the people with real knowledge, the people who had the experience running pro wrestling, who could make the business profitable, got pushed out the door.

I always said there would never be anyone else like Jim Barnett. What I didn't know at the time, though, was that a guy named Eric Bischoff would become better at being Jim Barnett than Jim Barnett was. You might be too young to know

anything about Jim Barnett, but I'm sure you know who Eric Bischoff is. Eric Bischoff is a carbon copy of Jim Barnett ... with a couple of exceptions. Barnett could recognize talent, and he knew that success was measured by putting wrestling fans' asses in the seats.

I was told that when Eric Bischoff turned in his résumé to get a job with WCW, he claimed he was the driving force behind Verne Gagne's AWA promotion in Minnesota. To hear Eric talk, you would think he was the mastermind who took Verne by the hand and led him to success. Of course, Verne Gagne will tell you that Eric was a coffee boy, just like Eric was when he started with WCW. He ran errands for Verne and mowed his lawn. Just kidding about the lawn ... I think. In wrestling parlance, we called someone like Eric a "gopher." It's also a fact that when Eric was an announcer with WCW, he wasn't considered to be a very good one. Not only was he a second-rate announcer, he was the "number three" announcer out of three. In fact, I was the only person who

would use him. At the time, I was making infomercials with another executive at TBS. Nobody else wanted to use Eric, so we used him on our infomercials. That's an impressive background for a guy who was handed control of a multi-million dollar company.

When a job résumé arrived at WCW, the standard procedure was to take it at face value. No one did any research to check on the legitimacy of the claims. If someone claimed to be the man who discovered the method of sending a rocket to the moon, The Suits would accept it without question. "Hey, that's good enough for me! In fact, if he did that, we should just let him handle our entire rocket program." They were that naive. It goes back to the time when Herd told me, "We pay him big money because he's the champion." That was ridiculous, but there was no way to talk any sense to management. If one of the guys claimed to be a star, that was good enough for the management at TBS.

Before Hunter Hearst Helmsley came to work for WCW, I was handed a copy of his résumé. He was the Rhode Island Interballistic heavyweight champion, the Eastern Connecticut heavyweight champion, the southwest corner of Maine Intergalactic champion, and the heavyweight champion on the border crossing by Halifax. I laughed until my sides hurt. At the bottom of his résumé, he summed it all up. "I'm currently in negotiations with Vince McMahon of the WWF." When WCW management read that, they couldn't let that kid get away. They hired him! For some strange reason, over the next few months, Helmsley began to shrink in size and all but disappeared. When WCW dumped him in 1995, he went back to Vince and began putting the pounds back on. All of a sudden, Helmsley was a superstar. At least Vince McMahon was enough of a manipulator to do something with him. But the idea that he turned in that résumé of accomplishments and titles was laughable.

When Watts hired me, Bob Dhue was directly in

charge, then above him was Bill Shaw, who had taken Jack Petrik's place. That being the case, I felt it was important that we go to Bob first. We all knew Bob because he used to manage the Omni. When we first started running in the Omni, we had to renew our Omni contract every year. Bob Dhue was really a nice guy, but he had a lot in common with John Ringley. Bob was a gladhander — a good guy who was a lot of fun to be around. He was the type of guy who never left college. He still belonged to the fraternity. He was always pledging. His main focus was on socializing and having a good time. I knew all that, but I liked him because he had been around for all those years.

Eric Bischoff, who was just an announcer for WCW at the time, began doing an end run around Bob and going directly to Bill Shaw. In fact, he was making a beeline to Shaw's office on a daily basis. I remember saying to him one time, "Hey, why don't you go directly to Bob Dhue? He's our immediate boss." Oddly enough, I never put

anything into his forays into Shaw's office because I thought, What can he be saying? He doesn't know anything. It wasn't too hard to guess what he was doing, but word got back to me about some of his meetings with Shaw. Basically, he was planting seeds in Shaw's mind. I'm guessing that he was saying things like, "These wrestlers are living in ancient times. They're just jocks! What do they know? Their ideas are unworkable. They'll never draw any money."

Once again, thinking as Shaw did, that wrestling was all make-believe, anybody should be able to do what Watts was doing. After all, isn't booking a wrestling card just a matter of putting wrestlers into the ring and telling them to do something that looks like wrestling? You go out there and pretend to wrestle, that's all. How much talent can it take to do that?

I suspect that when you combine Eric Bischoff's deviousness with the verbal abuse that Bill Watts directed toward Bill Shaw, it probably wasn't too

long before Bill Shaw decided he didn't want Watts around anymore. There were other factors that led to Bill being let go, but the straw that broke the camel's back was an interview that Bill did with one of the dirt sheets. Baseball Hall of Famer Hank Aaron, who is on the Board of Directors at TBS, interpreted some of Bill's remarks as racist, so he complained to his superiors at TBS. That whole situation was precipitated by a fat, tub of crap who is so insignificant that I won't even name him. Did Eric Bischoff have anything to do with Bill Watts losing his job? I don't know, but in my opinion, Eric was a devious, lying snake — and he eventually wound up with Bill's job.

Eric Bischoff is the one who arranged things so we could tape our television show at Walt Disney World. I was against it, but I didn't have anything to say about it. I was supposed to be in charge, but only over the wrestlers. Bill Shaw and Bob Dhue heard that I was opposed to the ideas, so they called me in and wanted to know why I was

against it. I went right back to the main source of their troubles — money. "I don't see any need to go to Disney World and spend millions of dollars." Once again, I was wasting my breath. Bill Shaw thought it was a wonderful idea and gave Eric the credit for it. Of course, Eric spent most of his time promoting Eric, either with the people at Disney World or with the brass at TBS. He used to fly to California regularly. He would be gone for a couple of days and the business would run itself — maybe not very well, but it continued to run. When Jim Herd was there, we had live shows running almost every day of the week. When Eric was running it, they had cut way back on the number of shows they ran.

Within a few weeks of making our first tape at Disney World, the boys started being the boys. Disney had a cafeteria where you could eat for a buck or two. It was remarkably inexpensive, but some of the guys weren't paying their bill. Can you imagine that? Those guys had huge contracts and were making hundreds of thousands of dollars,

yet they were stiffing the cafeteria for the one or two bucks they charged for a meal.

Then somebody took a dump on the floor of the studio. I was furious, so I called all the guys together for an ass-chewing session. Of course, everybody denied it. That's when I said, "Do you suppose one of the Disney World employees just walked in and shit on the floor of their own studio?" We never found out who did it, but I'm sure it was one of the boys. We were the only people using the studio that day. It's possible that a Disney employee might have snuck in, hoping to do something that would give us a bad name, but I have an easier time believing that a wrestler would do something like that. I told the guys, "If anything will get us kicked out of here, that would be it."

Whenever I addressed the guys about a problem, Bischoff always stayed in the background. You couldn't find him anywhere. What I didn't know at the time was that Bischoff took the guys aside later in the day and talked to them individually,

placating them.

Eric and I shared a secretary because we had adjoining offices at the Omni. I began to get calls from people who would say, "I've been trying to reach you for two days. Where have you been?" A woman from one of the Japanese promotions called for several days, trying to contact me for information on Leon White. I can't tell you what our exact conversation was, but when she finally got through to me, she said something that made me suspect that Eric was doing some behind-the-scenes finagling. The secretary finally told me that Eric had instructed her to reroute all my calls to him. She would tell people that I wasn't there, or that I was in a meeting, and divert them to Eric.

Eric continued to do the same thing he had been doing when Bill Watts was around, making end runs around Bob Dhue and going straight to Bill Shaw. I called him on it on several occasions, even making statements like, "You're going in

there to kiss Bill Shaw's ass, aren't you." I liked Bob Dhue too much to go over his head. Eric didn't mind at all. He knew where the power was. He knew it was Bill Shaw. Eric Bischoff's goal was to get rid of anyone who had potential for knowing something about the business. He knew that if he could bury both Bob Dhue and me, he would have the job — and that's exactly what he did.

At the time, none of us were aware of the stroke that Eric had with Bill Shaw. We didn't yet realize that for all intents and purposes, Eric was the boss. He was working on it every day. Things began to happen which made me suspect that he was getting more power, but I didn't have any time for him. How was I to know that it was only going to be a matter of time before I would be gone and he would be driving the company? Before I knew what had happened, he had official control of the company.

I really had the blinders on. I couldn't believe

that anybody would listen to Eric Bischoff — but The Suits at WCW did. It was only natural that Shaw would feel much more comfortable with somebody like Eric, who treated him like he was a bona fide boss. If I were to put a scenario together on how it all went down, my guess is this. Eric would simply insinuate to Bill Shaw that the wrestlers, Bill Watts and myself included, were all very crude and unable to think. We were all just wrestlers, about one-half step away from the Neanderthal man. I can just imagine the conversation that must have taken place. "Bill, these wrestlers are just like Bill Watts. They all think they're so smart, but they're all ignorant, arrogant pricks. You always have to worry about them punching you in the face if they don't like something you say to them." Of course, some of the things the wrestlers would do in the dressing room, or in the hotels, would reinforce that opinion. It doesn't take too much intelligence to realize that there might be something wrong with a guy who takes all his clothes off and runs around the hotel wearing nothing but his championship

belt.

It didn't dawn on Bill Shaw that some degree of skill was needed to manipulate the guys in the ring. Ted Turner himself alluded to that very thing during a meeting. "When I first brought baseball here to Atlanta," Turner rationalized, "it didn't do too well, but look at it now." At that time, they were fighting for the World Series title. "I remember my dad telling me something when I was a young man," he continued. "If you throw enough shit against the wall, some of it's gonna stick."

Well, my dad told me that, too, so I don't think his dad originated that saying. It was Ted Turner's philosophy, though. He believed that the wrestling business would somehow just miraculously turn around through no fault of its own. It would just happen. In his opinion, baseball pretty much just happened, too. He seemed to fell that way about everything he touched. If you waited long enough, it would just happen. He even said to me, "My baseball team didn't do well, either, but now

they're playing in the World Series." If Ted Turner believed that, then it was very easy for the people who worked for him to say, "Hey, Ted. It will come around. Just give it a little bit of time. We're working on it."

People like Bill Shaw and Jim Herd felt the same way. I don't think they really thought it took a lot of effort to be successful as a wrestling promoter. Success was going to happen in it's own time. All you had to do was spend the big bucks, if for no other reason than to make the powers-that-be think you're doing something significant. That was the philosophy that prevailed in WCW until the very end.

If Eric Bischoff could have manipulated the boys in the ring as well as he manipulated Bill Shaw behind the scenes, WCW would still be in business today. When things went right, Eric took credit for it. When they didn't go right, Eric would say it was somebody else's idea, even though it wasn't. He created a problem, then made it appear

as if he was solving that problem. He was like a fireman who sets a building on fire, then shows up later and becomes a hero by putting the fire out. For instance, a scenario I can imagine would go like this. If I did something to upset Bill Shaw, Eric would come to my defense. "Bill, I know that Ole screws up once in awhile and says things he shouldn't say, but overall, he really knows the business. Let me see if I can work with him and make him understand what he needs to do."

A week goes by and another problem comes up. Eric runs back to Shaw again. "Bill, you were right. Ole screwed up, again, but I like Ole so much. He really has a lot to offer. Let me talk to him again and see if I can get this straightened out."

If another problem didn't present itself, Eric had a good imagination. He created a problem. I haven't done anything wrong, but Eric keeps creating problems, while at the same time, he is my best friend. "Ole is so valuable to wrestling." In Shaw's mind, Eric Bischoff is the great

savior. When Shaw finally gets to the breaking point, Bischoff would say, "Bill, I've been working so hard, but I have to concede that you were right all along. Ole is out of control. I should have listened to you and fired him a long time ago. I think we should get rid of him tomorrow."

Shaw, of course, falls for it. "Eric, you're starting to learn about people and the way life works. You always thought so much of Ole. I admire you for sticking up for him, but I'm glad to know you realize you were wrong. That's a hell of an admission for you to make. I agree with you. Fire him."

The truth of the matter is, you didn't do anything wrong and nothing ever happened, but you lose your job.

Bischoff was smart enough to spend a lot of time with Bill Shaw. He laid out his plan on how wrestling could be run successfully, then swerved

Shaw into believing that he needed to appoint someone and give them absolute authority in order to accomplish that goal.

Who could fill that role?

Eric Bischoff!

"Who, me? Well ... gee, Bill. I really hadn't thought about that ..."

Put yourself in Bill Shaw's shoes. Who would you want working for you? Bill Watts, who tells you that you're a tiny piece of phlegm that he could have spit out when he sneezed? Or someone like Eric Bischoff, who said, "Yes, Mr. Shaw. That's right, Mr. Shaw. You're so smart, Mr. Shaw." Come on! Who would you want working for you?

In his magazine Whatever Happened to ...?, Scott Teal publishes interviews with the wrestlers. I gave him these examples.

"Scott, you wrote one hell of a book. Boy, that was a killer publication. I read the latest one from cover-to-cover and I was just mesmerized. Now I read it to my kids at night when they go to bed. It's so wonderful! It has something for everybody! Even my dad reads it."

Or, "That book sucks! I didn't like one single paragraph. The interview with so-and-so was a piece of crap! Did you write that when you were in the third grade?"

Which one would you want to hear? (Scott usually hears the second example.)

Bill Shaw fell in love with Eric Bischoff. I realize now that Eric Bischoff was the perfect match for Bill Shaw. The two of them got along together and they each thought they were geniuses. They didn't or wouldn't listen to people who were successful. They had too many important things to do to concern themselves with ideas that would draw money.

There was a time when Bill Shaw wanted to bring McCauly Caulkin in for a guest appearance. At the time, Caulkin had finished the Home Alone movie and was hot box office at the theaters. Shaw said, "Give him a hundred thousand dollars."

I fought against it. "Hell, no! If people want to see McCauly Caulkin, let 'em go to the movies."

In Shaw's defense, he didn't come up with the idea on his own. That was another idea he got from Eric Bischoff. Eric also began talking to Jason Hervey, the kid from the television program, The Wonder Years. I was in the dressing room in some town in Florida, handling the house show, when I saw this little, bitty fart stroll into the dressing room. I told him, "Get the hell out of here."

"I'm Jason Hervey," he answered.

"I don't care who you are," I responded. "Get the

hell out of here."

This was during the time when Eric was just beginning to get some real stroke. "Don't you know who that is?" Eric asked me, as if I was going to be impressed because the kid was a TV star.

"I don't care if he's the President of the United States," I replied. "He doesn't have any business in here." Of course, later on, Eric had a lot of stroke at WCW. And Jason Hervey was invited into the dressing room. By then, the only person who couldn't get into the dressing room was me.

Eric continued to consolidate his power through his relationship with Shaw. It was around this time that I finally took Bob Dhue aside and warned him, "You'd better watch it because Eric Bischoff is going to move you out. We'll both be out of a job." It wasn't too long before I didn't have anything to say about the booking. Before I knew it, I didn't have anything to do with anything. In the

latter part of the summer, Eric strolled into my office. "Ole, we want you to move out of your office. We know you like working with the guys on the wrestling end of things, so we want you to start working in the gym."

Eric Bischoff had taken complete control of the operation. I didn't even argue. I packed my things and moved to the gym. I do give Bischoff credit for one thing. When it came to playing the corporate games, he was a lot smarter than I gave him credit for being, and he was better at playing games than I was.

Chapter 48
The Power Plant

For the better part of 1993, I worked almost exclusively in the gym. At the time, it was located south of Atlanta in Jonesboro, Georgia. We just called it "the gym" at the time, but later, they called it the Power Plant. Within a week or two after I was transferred there, Eric showed up with Bill Shaw while I was helping train the students. After showing Shaw around, Eric sauntered over to the ring. In his own inimitable way, he said, "You know, Ole, when I see you in the ring with those guys, it's obvious that you like being in the ring. You do such a good job. I realize that you really are content."

Well, in truth — yeah! I did like working with the guys, but those comments were all smoke and mirrors on Eric's part. Eric didn't care one way or the other.

When Eric Bischoff demoted me to working in the gym, he thought he was punishing me. As it turned out, it was the best move I could have made. I was happy. I was making the same money, but I didn't have to be around that loony office. Once I accepted the idea that I was going to be relegated to the gym, I got the idea that I would try to show those kids something about wrestling. I got a lot of enjoyment out of actually trying to work with them and teaching them the things I knew. Whether they really cared about learning or not, I can't say for sure, but we did have some good kids who had a desire to learn about wrestling the way that I did. One of them, of course, was my son. Another kid with great potential was Erik Watts, Bill's son. Another one was a big German kid who had played pro football.

The original purpose of the gym was to give the kids some training and help them learn a little bit about wrestling. Jody Hamilton was running the gym, along with Dewayne "Sarge" Bruch and Pez Whatley. We tried to school the guys in the

fundamentals of wrestling. We taught them how to take falls, which is a peculiar concept. It's like teaching a carpenter how to hit his thumb with a hammer. We showed them how to run the ropes and how to apply the various holds. In essence, we were supposed to teach them what they needed to know in order to become an asset to the wrestling business, and more specifically, to World Championship Wrestling.

A few of the stars like Dallas Page came down to the gym once in awhile. They went through their little workout, then spent the rest of the time bragging about the fact that they were making $800,000 a year, or whatever they were making at the time. I remember asking the students to gather around and then telling them, "Study the moves that Dallas Page makes ..." Once again, I paused long enough for Dallas to swell up with pride, then I finished my thought. "... then don't do a damn thing he does because he doesn't have the first idea of how to wrestle."

If you want to make a lot of money, sell Dallas Page on eBay. If you could sell him for what he thinks he's worth, you'd be a multi-millionaire.

And I'm not just picking on Dallas Page. None of the guys had any idea of what it really took to get over. Think about the guys who are now working for the WWF. Is there anybody that the fans just absolutely have to go see wrestle? The only time the fans really get excited is when the promoters tack an outlandish stipulation onto a match. The winner will cut his opponent's balls off with a rusty knife and force him to eat them. I'm not even sure a stipulation like that would draw because most normal people wouldn't want to see it, but perhaps they would buy a ticket out of curiosity. They know the outcome is predetermined, but they wonder if the guy will really go through with it.

I used to tell those guys repeatedly, "You know, all the guys who are in the business right now need to be down here at the gym — every one of

them." There wasn't an exception to that. If you can think of one, let me know. From Flair on down, they all needed to be there. The funny thing about it was, those kids were savvy enough to realize they needed to learn how to wrestle. They watched the television shows. They also went to the WCW house shows when WCW was in the area. Surprisingly enough, they realized that something was missing, and before too long, they were coming back to the gym and asking questions that we just couldn't give good answers to. The most common question had to do with guys like Lex Luger. Those kids were as green as grass when it came to professional wrestling, but when they saw Luger on television, they realized he didn't know as much as they did, and he was making millions of dollars. So what kind of a downer do you think that was? They had to look at that and think, Well, gee whiz! Why am I down here working my ass off when Lex Luger can't even do the things that I can.

Did the gym serve a purpose? Yes and

no. Could it have served a purpose? Yes, it could have, but it really didn't. It wasn't necessary in the overall scheme of things when it came to getting someone ready for the business. For the longest time, I was too dumb to understand that. Actually, I did understand it, but I still wanted the new guys to learn the business the way I knew it. I wanted them to have some respect for the business, the same way I respected it. But the guys in the business then, and even more so today, thought that as long as they told the people that they were stars, that was all they needed. They didn't have to know how to wrestle. They didn't need to know anything about working. They could have cared less about the psychology of a match.

In 1990, when we were doing about $50,000 on house shows, Herd would complain that there wasn't enough money to justify running them. I used to argue that the house shows served several purposes. The angles helped fuel the pay-per-views and they brought a few extra bucks into the company coffers. That surplus would help pay the

wrestlers' salaries.

However, the most important purpose of the house shows was to give new talent a place to practice their trade and to sharpen their skills. At the gym, we could teach a guy the nuts and bolts of what goes into a wrestling match, but you had to be in front of the people to learn how to apply what you've learned in the gym. That's something the promoters no longer understand. You can't learn wrestling unless you're in front of people. I wanted the trainees to learn how to use psychology, and to understand what kind of a reaction they would get when they did a particular move in front of an audience. Whether you're a babyface or a heel, the only way to do that was to wrestle on a house show, night after night, learning to hone your skills by listening to the reactions of the audience. That's the part you can't learn in the gym. The house show is where you learn by doing. You practice in the gym ... you learn in the house shows.

That's why I fought to continue running the house shows. The young wrestlers needed to learn their craft, and the house show was the only place where they could actually learn to entertain and give the people a show. We didn't use either of those words when I was wrestling. We just said we taught you to give the people a wrestling match. I justified it by saying, "The guys have got to learn how to wrestle — not just the mechanics of wrestling, but also the psychology of wrestling. They need to know how to do something that will get a reaction from the people. They'll never be able to do that unless they're out in front of the people on a regular basis. Even if we lose money, they have to learn. But, we're making money, so as long as we're making money, let's keep on learning."

In 1992, we were still running the small spot shows. There was one place in particular that we ran every week. It was a western joint up near Marietta. The whole idea was to give the guys an opportunity to work before a live audience. WCW

wasn't running many house shows at the time that would give the young kids an opportunity to learn how to work. The bar in Marietta was a last resort. But it wasn't long before WCW had quit promoting the smaller, local shows and the bar, so the gym was the only opportunity the students had to learn. They no longer had an opportunity to test their skills in front of a live audience, and the gym wasn't enough.

In my opinion, as long as you can cover the cost of running the house shows, anything in surplus is going to end up paying for your wrestlers. The Suits didn't look at it that way. They would argue about running a house show that only made $50,000. First of all, they didn't think it was fair for the wrestlers to travel or to work every day. Secondly, they thought $50,000 was an insignificant amount of money. They only wanted to run Pay-Per-View events that a half million people would pay 30 bucks a pop to watch.

Even though I was away from the company

offices, Eric Bischoff and I eventually got sideways again. My understanding is that Eric had instructed everybody to report everything that was said or done at the gym. It was as if Eric was Jim Crockett Sr. reincarnated. No, it was worse than that. It was like Germany in 1935. Eric had everybody afraid that if they failed to tell him something, and he found out that they knew about it, they might get fired. Everybody became a stooge — even the people I trusted and never thought would stoop to that level. Jack Mulligan, Ric Flair, Lex Luger ... even Dallas Page, who I talked to all the time. If you name someone who was around at the time, the chances are good that they were reporting to Eric. Everything I said went straight to Eric. It all went to Eric. There were a few guys who hung around me that I trusted — my son, the German kid, Erik Watts, and two or three others who would go to the Holiday Inn with me for lunch. Of course, being seen with me was like the kiss of death. It wasn't too long before they all were fired and their developmental contracts weren't renewed.

The situation that initiated the final confrontation between Bischoff and me concerned a Swedish kid named Frank Anderson. Anderson had been a good amateur wrestler. A couple of times, he approached me with the idea of promoting wrestling in Sweden. He said he knew people who would front the money. I made a joke out of it, even making an offhand remark along the lines of, "Frank, if you can get backers to put up ten million dollars ... yeah, I'll go. If we get ten million, I want one million for myself. We'll see if we can run a wrestling promotion with the other nine. I'll run it for a year, then I'll take another million. If it doesn't work, I'll walk away."

I couldn't think of anything more ridiculous — but one of two things happened. Either one or more of the guys were so scared of Eric Bischoff that they felt they had to report everything they heard, or someone saw it as a good opportunity to nail me. The next thing I knew, Eric Bischoff was accusing me of conspiring to take the WCW talent to Sweden.

"Are you serious?" I asked. "Do you think someone would be dumb enough to give me ten millions bucks to promote wrestling in Sweden?"

In my opinion, Jack Mulligan was the one who started that issue. I liked Jack, but I had problems with him for several years. I used to rib him unmercifully, so some of our squabbles were my fault. I ribbed everybody, but I was probably tougher on Jack because I knew it got under his skin.

The first time he lost his cool with me, we were in Charlotte at the Channel 36 TV studio in the early to mid-70s. I was sitting in a chair, minding my own business. The next thing I know, something hit me on the side of the head. I looked up and saw Jack standing there. We exchanged a few punches and we both wound up with cut lips and bloody noses. The first thought that went through my head was that I might get fired. I was concerned about the disturbance it caused because it happened at the TV station during our interview

time, and that worried me. I went to the bathroom to clean up. While I was washing my face and cleaning my shirt, Jack walked in and began mumbling, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

"What's the matter with you?" I asked him. I don't remember what his exact answer was, but he told me about the hard times and the personal problems he was facing. Jack always had an excuse for flying off the handle. His wife was mad at him, or his kid was in some kind of trouble. I don't think we shook hands. We just finished cleaning up, then we walked out.

I was in several shoots with Jack Mulligan during our matches, but I didn't know it at the time. I didn't realize what he was doing. I don't remember the time sequence, but not too long after the situation at the TV studio, he was pounding the hell out of me during a match in Norfolk. I just thought he was working stiff, but it was stiff enough that Tommy Young, the referee, was buying it. He walked over to me and asked, "Jeez, what's

going on?"

"I don't know," I answered honestly. "Ask Jack."

I remember thinking it was funny because up to that point, I hadn't given one thought about whether Jack was working or shooting. The whole time he was flailing away at me, he was cursing. "Jack, what's going on?" I finally asked. He just kept swearing and throwing punches. "You SOB. You bastard!"

After the match, Jack was standing in the doorway of one of the dressing rooms. "Get over here, Anderson!," he shouted. "I'm gonna kick your ass!" He started mouthing off about how he planned to beat the hell out of me.

"Jack," I said, "if you plan to do all that, you'd better get started. I have to do a run-in during the next match, so I don't have time for your shit." Jack didn't follow through with his threat, so I went to the ring. When I came back, he had

already left the arena.

A few nights later, Jack came looking for me while I was eating. Crockett used to take us out to dinner. The owner would lock up when we came in to eat. Jack showed up at the restaurant and pounded on the door until the owner unlocked it. "I'll kill that SOB." I'll do this. I'll do that. It never came to trading blows that time, but once again, he was upset about something.

Jack called me one afternoon when I was in the Charlotte wrestling office and threatened me. "Ole, I'm gonna come down there and kick your ass." That was the standard line he used every time he got worked up about something. He was always going to "kick my ass." I just never knew why he was going to kick my ass. As usual, I just went along with Jack's rantings. "Okay, Jack."

"Where are you, Ole?"

"Uhh ... Jack, you called me. You called me here

at the office. That should give you a clue. Do you remember where the office is?"

"Well ... uhh, ahh. Well, dammit! I'll be right down there." Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

I always kept a set of brass knuckles handy in my desk drawer. I also had a short baseball bat, about the length of a billy club. I kept them around as insurance because I had been threatened by everyone in the world. If all the guys had followed through with their threats, I would have been dead a hundred times. Thirty minutes after his call, Jack came barging through the door, huffing and puffing. He leaned toward me over my desk — and apologized. It was the same old story. "I'm sorry. I'm having problems again." It was just more drivel, like always. His wife was doing this or that. His groceries weren't bagged properly. Someone cut him off on the exit ramp. His finger poked through the toilet paper. I don't remember just what his reasons were, but he was all apologetic. Once again, the confrontation

was over before it ever began.

One time, I made a trip to Minneapolis and stopped by the TV studio where Verne was taping interviews. As I walked in, the first person I saw was Jack Mulligan. I put my hands up in self defense and said, "Jack! Are we gonna have a problem?"

He started laughing and slapping his knees. "Oh, damn, Ole. You're always so funny about things."

"I just wanted to ask because I'd like a little warning."

"Oh, no, no, no, no. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha."

I said, "Okay, fine," and put my hands down. My understanding is that he walked out of Minneapolis a week or two after that. He just packed his bags and left. He didn't give Verne any advance notice and nobody knew why he left.

Our last run-in was at the gym in Atlanta. By

now, I was no longer in the position of authority that I had been in for the two or three months after I hired Jack. Less than two hours after I repeated my comment to Jack about going to Sweden, Eric called me at the gym. "What are you trying to do with the talent? Do you intend to take Frank Anderson with you? Who do you think you are?"

It took me a few minutes to realize what Eric was talking about. He just went on and on. "I heard that you and Frank Anderson are going back to Sweden. You're getting some investors together and you're going to run wrestling against us."

"Eric!" I asked, "Who told you that?"

"Well, is it true or isn't it?" he asked in return. I can't remember what I said, but as I hung the phone up, Jack walked in. Then it dawned on me. It could only be one of two people — Jack or Jody Hamilton. For that matter, it could have been both of them. I looked at Jack and asked point-blank, "Jack, what did you tell Eric?"

I don't remember what he said, but the next thing I know, Jack punched me in the face. Typical Jack. We had been there before I didn't throw a punch in retaliation, but I got right into his face and said, "Jack, if that makes you feel better, then go ahead and do whatever you want to do." Jody jumped up and got between us.

I never thought about it before then, but Jack had hit me many times before in the ring when I thought we were working. That was my frame of reference. I knew it wasn't a work at this point, but by the same token, I was kind of amazed that his hands were so soft. His punches really didn't hurt. It suddenly dawned on me that it felt as if he didn't have any bones in his hands. It was almost like he was wearing a thick pair of gloves.

Jack finally left and walked out into the gym area. After ten or fifteen minutes, I went looking for him. He was sitting in the gym area. As I walked up to him, he said, "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. Punch me. Just go ahead and hit me. I

deserve it."

I said, "No, Jack. I'm not gonna hit you, but I'm not gonna put up with this again. Ever!"

A few days later, Dusty said, "Jeez, I heard you had a run-in with Jack ... again." Dusty told me that Jack said I threatened to kill him. I don't know. I don't think I told Jack that I would kill him, but it is possible that I could have said just about anything at the time. I didn't argue with Dusty. I just let it go.

A few weeks after the incident with Jack, Eric came to me and said, "That Buff Bagwell kid needs to be taught a lesson." Eric wanted me to beat the hell out of Bagwell. I was supposed to call Bagwell down to the gym for a workout, then stretch him. I almost fell for it because I didn't like Bagwell, but at the last minute, it dawned on me. This is a setup. I do something to Bagwell ... and then they have a reason to fire me. Who knows what else they might pile on me. Criminal

charges?

When I began to look at the whole picture, I suddenly realized — that's what Eric was trying to get Jack to do. In my opinion, Eric convinced Jack to hit me so I would either quit or fight back. If I fought back, it would give Eric an excuse to fire me. But it didn't work because I didn't fall for it. I just took the punches. I really don't know what happened, but a few weeks later, Jack was gone. I didn't have anything to do with him losing his job. I wasn't in a position to do anything. On one level, I thought Jack quit. On another, I thought perhaps Eric fired him because he failed in his job with me. For whatever reason, Jack was gone.

I never held any animosity against Jack Mulligan. I didn't dislike him. Jack was just Jack. I liked Jack, even though he was goofy. I could have fired Jack anytime I wanted, but I never did. I used to watch Jack wrestle. He had some outstanding matches. In particular, he had some matches with the Iron Sheik that I thought were

terrific. Who hired Jack? I did. Even after putting up with all those years of Jack's crap, I hired him again. He was like everybody else that worked for me. If they had talent, if they drew money — I hired them back. Anybody I ever got in a fight with, I hired back. It didn't matter to me. The last time I hired Jack, Dusty recommended that we bring him in, so I agreed. We gave him a $60,000 salary, paid his transportation up and back, and paid for his meals and hotel while he was here. $60,000 wasn't big money, but all things considered, it wasn't bad. Jack came in on a Monday afternoon and left on Thursday.

Then something happened that caused more problems for me — a huge hot water heater was installed in the gym. I knew nothing about it, but somehow, I got blamed for it. Jody Hamilton said, "Eric called and said he was pissed at you for putting that oversized water heater in."

I was incredulous. "Hot water heater? What in the hell did I have to do with that?"

He said, "I don't know. I told him I didn't know anything about it."

At first, I didn't tumble to it, but then I realized that it was Jody who ran the gym. I had nothing to do with the operation of that gym. I was down there helping out, but the head of the gym was Jody. It had always been Jody. He purchased the equipment. He got the rings. Jody knew about everything that went on at the gym. But for some reason, Jody said Eric wanted to know why I put that water heater in.

I never gave it any thought, but Jody used to have meetings with Eric at least once a week for several hours. It's my guess that he was telling Eric exactly what was going on in the gym. Who said what to who, when, and where. And of course, Ole said a lot of things to everybody about everybody. I was the type of guy who, if somebody asked me a question, I would answer directly and honestly. I would confide in Jody because Jody was one of the boys. I never spoke

against the company, unless what I said about Sweden was speaking against the company. I knew there wasn't a chance that Sweden would happen, but I did joke about it.

There were times when Jody would tell me, "So-and-so said you did such-and-such."

"What did you tell them?" I would ask.

He would say, "I told him I didn't know anything about it."

I don't think Jody is the type of guy who would make up stories, but he would skirt around an issue, like he didn't want to get involved. He wouldn't defend anything. For instance, somebody might tell me, "Tom Smith is suspected of having robbed the First National Bank at four o'clock on Thursday." If I had knowledge to the contrary, I would have spoken up. "That would have been impossible for Tom to do because I was talking to him on the phone at that time." If Jody knew that

Tom Smith didn't do it, he wouldn't say, "No, he didn't." He would say, "Well, that's none of my business." He didn't speak up, so in some cases, I can only assume he didn't take a stand which he knew to be correct, or he allowed an accusation, which he knew was groundless, to stand. Think about it. If you saw someone robbing a bank, or breaking into a house ... wouldn't you report it to the cops?

The oversized water heater was a good example of that. I eventually asked Jody, "What did you tell Eric? You're the one who makes the decisions here at the gym. I don't have a thing to do with anything down here." If I didn't do it, then either Jody knew who did it, or he did it himself. Why didn't he explain that when Bischoff accused me? You also have to understand that Jody was there until the very end, so it would be very difficult to believe that he, at any time, would have taken a stand on anything that was right or wrong, because everybody else got canned. Everybody who was associated with wrestling back in the

Dark Ages got canned, but Jody remained. He made it through Dusty's reign. He made it through mine. He made it through Jim Herd. He made it through Bill Watts. He made it through Bob Dhue. He made it through every regime that took power.

It all boils down to the fact that the guys were all scared silly of Eric because he demanded such complete control over everyone. People were constantly looking over their shoulders, waiting for the axe to fall. Jody and Jack both found themselves in an awkward position. I think they were scared of losing their job. I suppose everybody was, and I don't blame them. I really like Jody, but Jody was 60-something years of age, so he was in a position where it would have been hard for him to find another place to work. Like so many people at WCW, I think he was scared of losing his job. They were scared and intimidated by the stroke that Eric Bischoff had. Eric did have the stroke. I'll give him that. Bill Shaw thought Eric was the salt of the earth.

Of course, that's the way the wrestling business has always been. One difference between the way the old promoters ran things and the way Eric Bischoff ran things was that the old promoters were at least trying to protect the business and make it work. Eric Bischoff didn't care about the business. He only cared about Eric Bischoff.

For example, when I was running Georgia, I didn't need any stooges, but I did expect the guys to tell me if someone was violating a principle. I had a few guys who would report to me and tell me if serious infractions had taken place. If someone showed up drunk at the matches, I wanted to know about it. If someone trashed their motel room, I wanted to know about it. For the most part, though, I was my own stooge. I listened to everybody and made up my own mind about what was going on. It all reflected on the business and the wrestling promotion. After all, that was how we made our money.

Not too many days after the water heater incident,

Eric came down to complain about something else. I was fed up with his nonsense. Since he was supposed to be a big black belt boy, I decided to push him to the edge. I said, "Eric, I've been told by several people that you always wondered if you could kick my ass. I also know you sent other guys out to try to do that." I was speculating at that point about his black belt because I didn't know for sure, but he didn't deny it. "But they didn't get the job done," I continued. "Maybe this is the time when you and I find out who can beat who."

Eric went into his vaudeville song and dance. "What do you mean. How can you believe that, Ole? If it wasn't for me, you wouldn't even have a job. I'm the one who spoke up for you when Bill Shaw wanted to fire you. I tried to help you with your kid." The whole time he was talking, he was slowly backing up. At first, I was facing him with my back to the door, but now he was sidling around me, trying to get to the door. I continued to provoke him, but he wouldn't go for

it. He wasn't going to do anything. He made it out the door. The next day, someone from the office called and told me that I didn't have to come to work anymore. This was the second time in my life that I was fired. Once again, I was fired while working for TBS.

Eric got rid of me first, and soon, Mike Graham, Bill Dundee, and Greg Gagne, Verne's son, were following me out the door. We all got canned. Barnett told me a few months later that Eric came into his office and said, "Jim, I hate to be the one to tell you this. This is the hardest thing I've ever had to do." Barnett said he didn't give Eric time to finish his little speech. He knew right away what it was about, so he just stood up and left.

Eric was really a class act. He was called in as a witness during the Gold Club racketeering trial in the summer of 2001. To give you an idea of Eric's true character, here's a portion of an article written by CNN.

Former World Championship Wrestling figure Eric Bischoff testified Tuesday that he and a professional wrestler once went to the club's VIP room, where dancers joined them and performed sexual acts.

On another occasion, Bischoff said, he went to the club with his wife and the two left with [Jana] Pelnis [a former dancer]. The trio then went to a hotel room for a sexual encounter.

"That is a bit of blur," Bischoff said. Using Pelnis' stage name, he said, "I think it was between my wife and Frederique."

CNN, July 24, 2001

How much lower could you get? That's the kind of guy Eric Bischoff is.

If I gave you the impression that Jim Herd spent a lot of money, I couldn't even begin to describe the amount of money that Eric Bischoff spent. Jim Herd was a miser compared to Eric Bischoff. I

heard the talent budget shot up to around $60 million.

Shortly after I was fired, I wrote this letter to Ted Turner —

Dear Ted,

Ann Gunkel always said, "Ted watches the numbers." From watching the numbers, you and I both know that your wrestling organization, WCW, is not getting the numbers. If you remember, Ted, when I ran Georgia Championship Wrestling and WCW from 1974 to 1984, we both enjoyed tremendous success. As someone who knows the business, having been a wrestler, a matchmaker, a TV producer, and owner, I can tell you that WCW has no idea what it's doing or how to make it right. If WCW continues as is, and extreme changes are not made, it will lead to financial disaster and the demise of what has been a viable business and ratings winner.

Ted, if you want it fixed, call me.

Sincerely,

Ole Anderson.

He sent his response on a card —

Dear Ole,

It's nice to hear from you. Thanks for your June 15th letter. I forwarded it to those involved with our wrestling operation. I'm grateful for your interest in working with us again.

Sincerely,

Ted

I should have written back. "If I write a letter telling you that the foxes are eating the chickens, the worst thing you could do is send copies of that letter to the foxes and ask if the chickens are safe." But that's what Turner did. I would guess

that The Suits sent it right up to the very people who were destroying the business.

Later on, after Bob Dhue himself was out of a job, we were talking about the things that were going on in WCW. When I mentioned the bad management decisions, he said, "Well, you had your chance."

"I had my chance to do what?" I asked.

"To run the company."

"That never happened."

He made it sound like I screwed up. Maybe I did, but I don't know what else I could have done. My hands were tied behind me. The only way I could have done what I needed to accomplish was to do what Eric Bischoff did and bypass Bob Dhue, but I was loyal to Bob. I wasn't going around him to get to Bill Shaw. I just shook my head in disbelief at his statement. "Bob, how stupid are you? You're not working, either."

The irony of the whole situation is that Eric Bischoff, along with everybody else, lost his job when WCW went out of business in March 2001. So much for people who thought wrestling was easy, who thought anyone can do it. "Just put some tights on ...."

Chapter 49
The Prestigious Hall of Fame

Mike Mooneyham called to get my opinion about a so-called Wrestling Hall of Fame that appeared in one of the trade sheets. Mike read me the names of the people who were inducted this year. He said one of the strikes against Gene and me being considered for the Hall of Fame was that Gene and I had "never ventured into other territories." In other words, we spent most of our career wrestling in Georgia and the Carolinas. We never wrestled for Vince McMahon, so we had never been so-called stars in New York. We never wrestled in Oregon for Don Owens, or Southern California for Mike LeBell, or Kansas City for Bob Geigel.

I told Mike, "The fact that I may or may not be included on the list of Hall of Famers doesn't

matter to me. It's a bullsh– list that doesn't mean anything in the real world. That having been said, let me explain how ignorant the people are who vote someone into your Hall of Fame."

First of all, for the most part, there were no contracts, guaranteed or otherwise, in the wrestling business. You were an independent contractor. As a rule, if you came into a territory, you had to be prepared to leave after a few months. The maximum amount of time that a wrestler would stay in one territory was about six months. The reason a wrestler would pack his bags and leave for another territory is because he was no longer wanted where he was. Even if you were on top, and working in the main events, the promoters would tell you to leave when you ceased to draw money. If you worked underneath, in the first few matches, they moved you just to change the talent. I already told you what old man Crockett used to say: "You can buy a house here, but make sure it has wheels underneath it." Very few people were given the opportunity to remain in

any particular territory for any length of time. Talent moved in and out of Georgia all the time. The wrestlers went to Florida, the Carolinas, Texas, California, Oregon, Tennessee. However, the promoters never kept anybody for any length of time because they realized how important it was to bring in new faces. They wanted to keep things fresh and new for their fans. Not only that, but promoters didn't keep talent for too long because very few wrestlers were good enough to keep things interesting for the people after six months or so.

If a guy was making good money, do you think he would want to move his wife, take his kids out of school, pack all his belongings, and move down the road a few hundred miles, just so he could be voted into a bullsh– Hall of Fame in the year 2001? If you really think about it, you'll realize that the reason Gene and I stayed in the Carolinas wasn't because it was something that we wanted to do. In that regard, it didn't make any difference what we wanted. It was a matter of somebody

wanting us to stay there, and allowing us to stay there, and paying us to stay there. As long as Gene and I were paid what we thought we deserved, we were willing to stay there. It was the same situation with Georgia. We were making money taking short trips. Who wanted to move to Minneapolis, make half as much money, and take trips that are four times as long? Do you think that the guys who were traveling all over the country wanted to travel all over and wrestle in all the territories so they could be voted into the Hall of Fame? They had no choice. They had to leave because the promoters told them to leave, forcing them to find a new place to work.

So in regards to Gene and myself spending most of our time in Georgia and the Carolinas — no, we didn't go to New York. We didn't work for Paul Boesch in Houston, or Bill Watts in Oklahoma. However, was it a matter of us not going to those places because we couldn't go? No! It was because we were making a lot of money where we were. Better yet, the promoters

wanted us to stay because we were making money for them, and in turn, the promoters paid us well. So if anyone should be considered as an attraction in the business, you would sure have to count Gene and me because we were able to remain in just two territories for most of our careers, and we made and drew money consistently for a large number of those years.

Mike also brought up the question of why Verne Gagne kept the title for so long. "You tell me," I prompted.

"Because he could beat everybody?" he guessed.

"That might be true, but no ... there's another reason for it."

He came up with three reasons. One, Verne had an ego, so he kept the belt on himself. Two, Verne was a great amateur, so nobody could beat him for the title. And three, he owned the territory, so he could do whatever he wanted to do. All three of

those reasons were true.

But there's a fourth reason.

I've heard people talk about this subject many times in the past. There's one answer that nobody comes up with because nobody really knows the business as much as they think they do, and that's the whole point I'm making. No matter how smart people think they are, I could ask them that one question to see what answer they give me.

So why did Verne keep the belt for so long?

It wasn't because he had a big ego, although he did. It wasn't because he was a tough bastard, although he was. It wasn't because he owned the territory, although he did. There's one simple reason.

When Verne Gagne told Verne Gagne what he wanted him to do, Verne Gagne never gave Verne Gagne any crap.

Hello?

You can think what you want about Verne keeping the belt on himself, but at least when Verne wanted to do something with that belt, he knew good and well that he wasn't going to give himself an argument about it. He wasn't going to say, "I'm not gonna do that."

"Hey, Verne. We need you to slip this guy over tonight."

"Hell, no! I'm not doing that."

Or, "We need you guys to split the first two falls, then have your opponent get disqualified in the third fall."

"Hell, no! I can't have a disqualificaiton. I've gotta beat the guy three straight!"

Six months after Verne put the American Wrestling Alliance belt on Stan Hansen in 1986, Stan got mad and refused to drop it to Nick

Bockwinkel when Verne asked him to drop it. Stan left the territory and went to Japan — with the belt.

That didn't happen to Verne when Verne was the champion.

I suspect that was one good reason why Verne kept the belt on himself. How many people ever thought of that? How many ever stopped to think that through? There are a lot of people who were bookers who wouldn't be able to give you that answer, either. I never got that answer from anybody. When Verne put that belt on himself, he never had an argument with the champion.

Not only that — but Verne always knew that the champion was going to have a great match.

When Gene and I were the bookers in Georgia, who were the champions?

Gene and me.

I'm reminded of something I've said many times in the past few years. If WCW was still in business, it would be impossible for me run the company now. For that matter, it would be impossible for me to start a new organization. The reason? I can't work any more ... and Gene is dead. When I was booking, Gene and I were the only people I could truly count on. I knew I could get one hell of a match out of the Anderson brothers.

If the people who voted on the Hall of Fame are as smart as they think they are, they would give a lot of thought to the nuts and bolts of the wrestling business. If you own a promotion, you not only have to deliberate on what ideas will work, but also on what ideas won't work. If you own a wrestling company, you don't want to wake up in the morning to discover that your business partners have sold control of your company. That's the reason so many people booked themselves in the main events. They had someone they could count on. They had someone they could trust — without

question! Yes, I have an ego, but at least I didn't have to argue with anybody when I was in the ring. I did what I wanted to do. If somebody didn't like it, they were welcome to find work elsewhere. I didn't care.

So not qualifying for the fantasy Hall of Fame because Gene and I were in the same two territories for most of our careers is a flawed premise. It wasn't because we were so bad that we stayed in those two territories. It was because we were so good that the promoters wanted us to stay. We drew money and we made money for everyone. Very few wrestlers could do that.

Most wrestlers, however, knew that they might be able to stay three to six months, maybe even as much as a year. Then they would have to move to a different territory ... a surefire way to get into the Hall of Fame.

Chapter 50
Star Search

In 1993, before I was relegated to the gym, my secretary called and said, "Two men want to come up to talk to you about going to work."

I said, "Okay, send them up."

The two guys were well-built and they looked impressive. I didn't know if they could wrestle, but by 1993, knowing how to wrestle wasn't important. I asked facetiously, "Have you ever watched wrestling on TV?" They both nodded their heads. I said, "Hell, that's good enough." I didn't have any contracts on hand, so I said, "I'll tell you what. I'll give you $1,000 a week with a three-month contract." I never would have offered them that much in the old days, but TBS was into spending Ted's money, so I made them the offer. I told them, "We'll see what you look like. If

everything goes well, we'll extend your contract for another three months."

They were supposed to start the following week, but two days later, they showed up in my office again. They started out with, "Geez, we hate to bring this up, but we have some questions we need to ask."

"Yeah?" I asked.

"Well, we were talking to Vince McMahon and he said —"

I cut them off at the pass. "Stop right there."

"Well, we —"

"Stop. Don't say another word. If you guys want to work for Vince McMahon, I wish you all the luck in the world. When you finish up with the WWF and want to talk with me again, come back down here. I have a lot of things to do now, so I wish you luck."

When they started to talk again, I said, "Hey, don't stand around here in the office. Get yourself up there to New York and make lots of money."

Mike Graham was chuckling. "What's the deal?" he asked.

"Well, if they want to go to New York, let them go to New York," I said. "I don't have a problem with that." And I didn't.

I didn't see those two again until 1994, after I had been demoted to the gym. I wasn't in charge of anything. They walked in and sort of loitered around. I didn't recognize them at first, then I remembered. "What have you

guys been up to? How are things going up in New York?"

"Well-lll ... we never got there."

"What? You told me you were talking to Vince McMahon!"

"Well, we had talked to some of the WCW guys. They told us that if we told you we were thinking about signing a contract with Vince McMahon, you'd give us more money."

"You've been out of work all this time?"

"Yeah," they admitted.

It was a waste of time for anybody to threaten me, or to attempt to hold me up for more money, because I knew I could always find somebody else with a body. WCW management was never able to understand that there are a thousand Randy Savages in the world. There are a thousand Ric Flairs out there. Well, maybe not a thousand, but I could have found a few who might have even been better. If The Suits took the time to look, they could have found several thousand 6-foot-7 Hulk Hogans, but they never took the time to look, so they thought Terry Bollea was the only person who could fill Hulk Hogan's boots. As a result, those guys were able to command huge salaries. And as

long as The Suits kept on thinking that those guys were the only people who could fill those roles, not even understanding what their role was, it made it very easy for those guys to hold the company up for bigger and more lucrative salaries.

By the time Vince McMahon and Ted Turner became the only two major players in the business, the wrestlers were all perceived as stars. As a result, they were given star salaries. Vince paid his people fairly well. In fact, Vince is the one who opened the door for the wrestlers to make decent money, but I don't think Vince ever intended to pay somebody more than Vince himself was making. I'll guarantee you one thing: If Vince doesn't make money, eventually, the wrestlers won't be making money, either.

The people at TBS who were running World Championship Wrestling, however, paid their people extraordinarily well. When Turner took over, the first thing his management team did was offer tremendous sums of money to the

talent. Even the guys who were just getting started were making anywhere from $100,000 to $150,000. Jim Herd wanted to be in charge of a crew of wrestlers making hundreds of thousands of dollars because that would make him look like a big shot. He didn't want to be in control of a bunch of mice working for fifteen cents a week. He wanted to make it look like he was in charge of something that was really important. As a result, he felt like he had to pay the guys outrageous salaries. The perception of management was, "We've heard about people like Hulk Hogan, Randy Savage, and Ric Flair. They must know what they're doing because those guys are big stars. We definitely need them." They were handing out contracts worth hundreds of thousands of dollars to people like Ric Flair because "he's the champion." Somewhere along the line, they forgot how he got to be the champion. They thought the fact that he was the champion meant something. Since they didn't know how the business worked, they thought being champion meant Ric Flair was the John Wayne of

the wrestling industry.

All of a sudden, management was bowing down to the talent and treating them like stars. It didn't take very long before Hogan, Flair, Savage and everybody else began thinking, Yeah, that's right. We are stars. Once the stars came to the realization that the marks were no longer sitting in the audience, but were now in management, things got worse and worse and worse. The wrestlers began to take advantage of their star status. For the first time ever in the history of the wrestling business, they begin working their own programs outside the ring.

"Uh ... Mr. Herd? I have a problem. I can't make the matches tonight. My wife doesn't feel good."

Of course, Herd immediately caved. "Oh, that's okay." That scenario would have never happened with me. If one of the guys had called me and said that, I would have verified his qualifications to make such a statement.

"Are you a doctor?"

"Well, no."

"I didn't think so. Have your wife go see a doctor while you go to the matches."

Now and then, someone might persist and try to sway me. "Yeah, but she's really sick."

"Well, you have to make up your mind. Do you want to be a doctor, or do you want to be a wrestler and make money working for me?"

When one of the guys wanted time off because his grandmother had died, I began to grill him. "What are you going to do — resurrect her from the dead?" He stammered. He didn't know how to respond. "If you wanna work, then let's get to work," I suggested. As I walked away, the guy pulled a gun out of his bag and aimed it at the back of my head. I didn't know about it until Stan Hansen and some of the guys told me about it later. I asked Stan, "Why didn't somebody warn

me?"

He just grinned and said, "We wanted to see if he would actually shoot you."

I could tell by Stan's answer that deep down, he really liked me. Stan just wanted to see if the guy would shoot me. How thoughtful.

I told you the story about Paul Orndorff. When he got hurt, all I wanted him to do was put in an appearance at the arena. Instead, he decided to stay at home — so I fired him the next day. None of the guys would have missed back then. If I had a guy who missed one day because he was hurt, let me tell you — he had to be hurt. I mean, he had to be hurt! I expected a written statement from a legitimate doctor, not one of Flair's doctors who became part of the business.

The Greenville incident is a good example of how I personally looked at commitment to the business. I got cut and left for dead ... but I didn't

die. Of course, that fact alone pissed a lot of people off. I only missed one day after being sliced open. I didn't want to miss TV, so two days after I got cut, I was wrestling on TV in Raleigh. As a result, for several weeks afterwards, I was ripping the stitches open. I had to be re-stitched several times. I walked into the dressing room after my match one night when Jimmy Crockett was there. I was holding my chest together, just like I did on the night I got cut. I was bleeding. If you had a mind to, you could stick your finger right into my chest. I said, "Jimmy, this is what I do for you." He blanched when he looked at my chest and seemed to be on the verge of passing out.

Now the guys all have their own personal doctor. If they went to the doctor and said, "My back hurts," their doctor wasn't going to say, "No, it doesn't." The doctor said what the wrestlers wanted him to say. "Okay. You'd better have rest for a few days." The doctor gives you a note, you take it to Jim Herd, and you take a week off. In the

meantime, you still get paid. In the old days, you didn't get paid. That being the case, how often do you think a guy would claim to be injured and sit out? I know guys who had broken limbs and made it. I only missed that one day in my career. You can't point to another day that I missed. I was knocked out several times, but even then, I wanted to make sure that I got my $75 payoff. Gene hauled me down to the matches and propped me up in a corner with a stick up my ass so I would stay upright.

Harley Race, Ronnie Garvin, Jack Brisco, Gene Anderson. You name any wrestler. They all felt the same way, even if the payoff was only $25. Twenty-five bucks was a big deal and nobody was going to pass it up.

I had wives call me and say, "My husband hasn't had a weekend off for several weeks. He's been working every day and I want him to be off this weekend."

I wouldn’t argue. "Fine, he’s off."

"Where is he working on Monday?"

"I don’t know."

"Well, what’s running on Monday?"

"Augusta and Calhoun."

"Is he booked in either of those towns?"

"No."

"Oh. Well, is he booked in Macon on Tuesday?"

"No."

"Then when is he working?"

"I don’t have any idea. If you go out and find him a job, he’ll be working. You tell me."

The next thing you know, the guy would be

chewing out the wife. "Dammit, don't interfere with my business. I told you I have to work and that's it. I have to work." It was really simple back then.

The guys used to work even when they were sick. They wouldn't necessarily tell me they were sick, but they did what they had to do. When TBS took over, the guys were sick all the time. They would lay out for any reason at all. If they didn't feel like working, they just didn't work. "Hell, I don't feel good. I think I'll stay home." That attitude all began with The Suits at WCW when the wrestlers were given guarantees. Whether that guarantee was for the year, a month, or whatever it might be, it changed their whole outlook and work ethic. With the shift to annual guarantees, the result was an almost immediate shift in attitudes. Once the stars realized they could get away with taking time off, they began taking bigger liberties. Pretty soon, they couldn't wrestle for a month.

If you keep getting paid whether you're hurt or

not, eventually, you're going to be hurt — whether you're hurt or not. And as long as you come up with some reason that will convince your boss that you're hurt, you're going to continue to be hurt — whether you're hurt or not. Pretty soon, the guys were taking a little bit more time off — then a little bit more — and a little bit more. Pretty soon, they didn't even have to be hurt.

"I won't be there tonight because I'm mad about this and I'm mad about that."

"Well, what's the problem? What can we do for you?"

"Well, I've gotta go over and this is how I wanna go over."

They would usually have a laundry list of their demands.

"I need a limousine."

"I need a five-star hotel."

"I want first class airfare ... oh, and I want first class airfare for my wife."

That never would have happened 20 years ago, but the tail had finally taken over and was wagging the dog. If they had given me carte blanche during the '90s, when I was with WCW, the guys would have worked their rear ends off and would have learned the business to the best of their ability. They would have been manipulated by somebody who knew the business. And — they would have received a decent payday. However, they wouldn't have been paid millions of dollars unless there were millions of dollars in profits to share with them.

The biggest mistake Turner made was bringing upper management people into the business who didn't have a clue about what it took to make a wrestler. They thought Lex Luger was star material because he looked great. They were impressed by the fact that he had a great body, but they didn't take into consideration the fact that he

produced it with the help of steroids. They thought a body was all that was needed to be a wrestler. What they couldn't recognize was the fact that Lex Luger had no talent. Even though they pushed him like crazy, they were never able to make anything out of him, and he never drew any money. In spite of that, nobody ever considered the fact that perhaps Luger wasn't a star after all, and yet he still commanded big money because he was perceived as a talent.

Management didn't stop to think for two seconds that there were thousands of Lex Luger clones at the gym. Some of them might even have had some ability to talk on the mic — an ability that Lex Luger lacked. Some of them might even have had a wrestling background — a background that Lex Luger lacked. Some of them might even have had a magnetic personality — a personality that Lex Luger lacked. They never gave that a thought.

Randy Savage was another star at WCW. When I first met Randy Savage, I only hired him because I

knew his dad. I told him, "I'll hire you. You can come work for me in Georgia, but you'll be working on the first or second match and you'll do jobs." What else could I do with the guy? He was a skinny baseball player who probably weighed less than 180 pounds.

Randy developed a reputation for getting into fights quite often — until he picked on Rip Rogers. Rip stood up to Randy. Rip was an off-the-wall kind of guy. For instance, if you tried to embarrass Rip by saying, "Hey, Rip. I heard you're sleeping with your sister," he would say, "So what's your point?" That answer would stop you in mid-sentence. Your comment was no big deal to him. If you said, "Hey, Rip! I heard you have candy bars in your front seat and you're luring five-year-old girls from the elementary school into your car," he might say, "So what are you trying to say?"

I liked Rip because he had a great attitude. He never claimed to be a tough guy — because he

wasn't. He would make it known up front that he didn't want to fight anybody. If you asked Rip how tough he was back then, Rip would have told you, "I can't beat anybody." He didn't feel the need to prove anything to anybody. He didn't get mad at anybody and he didn't want anybody to be mad at him. But when he and Savage got into it, Rip said, "I don't want to fight anybody, Randy, but I can, and will, kick your ass."

Then we come to Hulk Hogan — Terry Bollea. Terry Funk was the one who sent Bollea to me. I called him Sterling Golden. He was just a great big kid. The first time Barnett saw him, he said, "Oh, he looks so good." I'll give him that. Terry Bollea did look great, but he couldn't do much in the ring. Why should I mince words? He was the shits. Terry made something like $200 a week for a couple of weeks, then we got rid of him. I made arrangements with old man McMahon to bring him into New York at the end of 1979. I never heard anything about Terry Bollea again until he became a star with Verne Gagne in

Minneapolis.

Barnett was a little upset that I got rid of him. I said, "Jim, what was I gonna do with the guy?" Terry was too big to beat without making it obvious that he was doing a job. If I put him over, his matches still looked terrible because he was awkward and gangly. We couldn't put him in the same towns week after week, either. No matter how I looked at it, it wouldn't work. He had to go.

Hulk Hogan got over in New York because they didn't need guys who knew how to work. They didn't go to towns on a weekly basis, so he wouldn't expose himself like he was doing in Atlanta. I remember saying to Terry at the time, "They use all kinds of people up there. Your working ability or lack of it doesn't matter." I never saw Terry or talked to him after he left. I'm sure he didn't care whether he ever saw or talked to me again, either, but he was a waste of time. Hogan eventually got over, but Vince wasn't the person responsible for making Hogan a

star. The promoter who first helped Hogan get over was — Verne Gagne! When Hogan finally learned his gimmick, he went to New York, where Vince matched him against talent who could help him feature what he could do best.

Hulk Hogan was in the main event of a show that drew one of the biggest

indoor gates ever — more than 78,000 fans on March 29, 1987, at the Pontiac Silverdome. You can look at it in one of two ways. Either Hogan was lucky to be booked on that show, and lucky that people came, or you can say that the people perceived Hogan to be a star. In my opinion, he was perceived as a star by the people who bought the tickets. However, did he continue to draw money? No, because he had no idea of how it even happened. He couldn't tell you. Verne Gagne made Hulk Hogan a star. Years later, Vince McMahon made Hulk Hogan a bigger star. The only guy who couldn't make Hulk Hogan a star was — Hulk Hogan. When Hogan went to Atlanta

for WCW in 1996, it didn't particularly hurt Vince, but Hogan didn't do WCW any good for more than a short period of time. When he was given the opportunity to call his own shots, he didn't know what to do. If he didn't have somebody telling him where to pee, and if somebody didn't aim it for him, he missed the pot. He was lost. He even admitted as much to one of the executives at TBS. He said he depended on other people to manipulate him. I don't know whether Hogan would admit that now or not, but that was during a time when WCW was paying him millions of dollars. In 2002, Hogan went back to work for Vince again. The houses went up for a few weeks, but fell right back down to record lows.

When I got into the business, the Crusher was over like a million dollars in Minneapolis. If you weren't around during that time, you can't even begin to imagine how popular he was. And yet, who do you think programmed him?

Verne Gagne, of course. Verne was meticulous in

going over all the things I've talked about. I brought Crusher to Atlanta to work, but he didn't have a very good match. He came into the dressing room and said, "Hey, Rock. How did it look? What did you think?" I was shocked! Here was a guy who had been in the business at that point for more than 30 years. He was over so big in Minneapolis, and yet — he didn't really know how to get himself over without somebody telling how to do it.

Dusty Rhodes is another good example. We made a boatload of money with Dusty. He was one hell of a star. When I booked Dusty Rhodes, Dusty was very successful. When Eddie Graham booked Dusty Rhodes, Dusty was very successful. For the short period of time that Bill Watts booked Dusty Rhodes, Dusty was very successful. Who was the one person who booked Dusty Rhodes who couldn't make Dusty successful?

Dusty!

Dusty couldn't book Dusty. He couldn't do it on his own. Dusty rehashed the ideas that everybody else had done before him, until he finally ran out of steam. He didn't do it for Crockett. He didn't do it for WCW. Now he's running his own promotion and he's not doing it for himself. Do you get dumber as the years go by? I don't think so. If Dusty really was a star, in the sense that he was capable of making money by listening to and taking orders from someone who knew the business, then he is a star as far as I'm concerned. But on the other hand, he wasn't able to make money or run the business on his own. You would think that if Dusty knew what was going on, or knew at least as much as Eddie Graham or I did, there wouldn't have been anything to stop him. There wouldn't have been anything to stop him. That's why successful promoters didn't put all of their eggs into one basket. They wanted to make sure that basket contained a lot of eggs and a lot of potential stars. Verne got burned on that one because he made Hogan a big star. When Hogan walked away from him, Verne's territory was hanging.

There was only a limited number of people who really knew how to get themselves over on their own, without someone orchestrating the whole thing for them. Jimmy Crockett wasn't able to manipulate the business on his own, either, but you have to remember that Dusty was the guy running the show for Crockett. When Crockett merged with Bill Watts' promotion, Dusty believed that we had to beat all of Watts' talent in order to show the world how tough Crockett's wrestlers were. He didn't understand that in order to make the people believe that Watts' wrestlers were real competition, there had to be times when the best wrestler would be one of Watts' wrestlers. In my opinion, Vince made the same mistake after he bought WCW and ECW. He didn't do anything with either of the groups. Vince should have realized a long time ago, that unless you establish conflict between new people and develop new situations, you just can't move ahead.

Flair was in the same situation. Vince took Ric Flair from WCW back in 1992. That was a waste

of time and money because Flair didn't do anything of note in the WWF, and Vince couldn't do anything with him in regards to making money. When Flair went back to WCW, he still didn't do much of anything. Did he draw some money when we made him the champion in the early '80s? Sure, he did. Could he, on his own, do those same things that we did for him? No! He thought he was a star, but that didn't mean that he could draw a dime ... on his own.

Bill Goldberg got over in a big way for a short period of time, but nobody knew why it happened. If Goldberg knew what he was doing, then he would have kept on doing it, but he couldn't. Now he's working for Vince, and he's not doing it for him, either.

In the early '90s, WCW didn't want to use Steve Austin because they didn't know what to do with him. If Steve Austin had known what to do, he could have been a big star at WCW, but he didn't know any more than management did, so they got

rid of him. Vince, however, was able to manipulate Austin in such a way that Austin became a big star, just like Vince did with the Undertaker, Mark Callas. Mark was nothing in WCW. In fact, in 1990, I tried to get Mark to wrestle like Johnny Valentine. Mark was very slow and methodical, just like Valentine. I said, "Mark, you might be able to adopt a style that would be similar to John Valentine, where a limited movement brings a great response. When you do something, it means something." I tried to explain how John would do different things. When Vince hired Mark, he gave him a whole new character. In a sense, the Undertaker isn't so different from John Valentine, but he's John with a lot of gimmicks.

My point is this: Everyone at TBS knew that wrestling was make-believe, but they still thought the wrestlers were legitimate stars. Yet none of those stars ever proved anything, other than the fact that, at one time or another, they were involved with a promoter or booker who knew how to

manipulate them successfully.

Chapter 51
(Mis) Management

There's no question that Vince did a better job of running his business than WCW did theirs. From what I can tell, Vince did a better job because he had something going for him that the people at WCW didn't. It's my understanding that Vince was demanding. I heard that he would tell his people, "You're going to do it the way I want you to do it, so here's what you're going to do." As a result, he's been able to maintain some kind of a handle on business in the World Wrestling Federation, which is now known as World Wrestling Entertainment, Inc. His position was, "I'll make the decisions," along with assistance from people like Pat Patterson. Vince also insisted that you do a job on television during your first time in his territory. That was simply a control situation for him. He wanted to see if you would do it. If you refused, then he knew where you

stood, and more than likely, he would get rid of you.

Turner's people in World Championship Wrestling couldn't control their wrestlers because the people running it didn't know anything about the wrestling business. They hired people who were completely ignorant about wrestling and who had never had anything to do with the business. I know I've said this several times before, and you might be getting tired of it, but it bears repeating. In fact, I'll probably say it several more times before this book ends. The Suits in charge at WCW didn't think there was anything particularly difficult about managing a wrestling company. They didn't think you needed to have any knowledge about pro wrestling, or about wrestling — real wrestling. As far as the psychology of wrestling — forget it. Therefore, just about anybody could run the business — and that's who they hired to handle their company. Just about anybody. Jim Herd, Bill Shaw, Jack Petrik, Kip Frey. I suppose you could say they were all

fairly smart and well-educated. I'm guessing that they must have been to get to the position they were in with TBS. But who knows? The facts are, they all failed. Wrestling at TBS had thrived for many years when it was run by people who knew the business. But by the time TBS took over the wrestling promotion, no one knew much of anything about wrestling. Kip Frey was an attorney. What do attorneys know about wrestling? From my personal experience with attorneys, they don't even know very much about law. None of them had even the faintest idea of what it took to run a wrestling company.

I believe the people at TBS all thought wrestling was fake, and that simply meant that anybody could do it. In fact, most of those "executives" thought wrestling was a joke. If anybody can do it, then it doesn't matter who you put in charge of it. Of course, the exception to that is that you don't want a wrestler in charge. Wrestlers are sweaty neanderthals who don't know anything about the big business world. Several people at WCW told

me, "Your ideas are old. Nobody wants to see them anymore." Evidently, that's where they missed it. Something must have been wrong with their modern ideas because WCW went out of business. They took millions of dollars from Ted Turner's account and bought millions of dollars worth of no-talent wrestler wannabes. Nice hotels, nice cars, first-class plane tickets, gourmet meals, and monetary contracts that would make the NFL blush. When you consider that the football players in the NFL could at least play football, then you shouldn't wonder why TBS would have a hard time promoting wrestling when they couldn't find anybody who could wrestle.

At one time, the principal goal of a booker was "to put asses in the seats." The people at Turner Broadcasting didn't have to worry about that. They knew that Ted Turner had deep pockets, so they spent his money without giving any thought to a return on his investment. They kept Ted happy by pointing to the fact that he got some television programming out of the deal. Eventually, though,

the business couldn't sustain itself because it reached the point where they were losing more money than they could logically justify. In the year 2000, they lost more than $60 million dollars. As a result, AOL shut WCW down and cut wrestling out completely. Do you think AOL would have done that if WCW was making millions of dollars? No. WCW was losing millions of dollars, so they shut it down.

When I was still working for WCW, I was in a meeting one afternoon. I stood up and tried to explain what the old-timers did. I talked about how we looked at things psychologically, and how we put matches together. Every person at the table, and there might have been fifteen people, looked at me like, Where did this guy come from? He doesn't know what he's talking about. That's not how you promote wrestling. This is a new era! This is the '90s! At first, they used to say, "This is the '90s." Then they changed it to, "This is the new Millennium."

Well, it might have been the ‘90s. It might be a new era. It might even be the new Millennium. But the same methods will work — the ones that were tried and true over the years. The building industry might have new materials to build houses, but you still have to make sure the house is level. You still have to make it plumb. It still has to be square.

What would have happened if TBS had decided to build a skyscraper with the same management skills they used to destroy WCW? They didn’t have a carpenter. They didn’t have a bricklayer. They didn’t have a roofer. They didn’t have anyone with knowledge about construction. So how were they going to build this skyscraper? The answer is obvious. They couldn’t. They threw the plumb bob, level, and square out the window. They kept trying to build something, but there was no technique to it. There was no methodology. They just threw material on top of the pile in the hopes that it would look like something.

There are no tradesmen in the business today, either. Ric Flair? Hulk Hogan? Dusty Rhodes? Who do you want to name? If they're capable of doing anything, they're only capable if they have someone who knows how to put the building up. They're very limited in what they are able to do. They can only do what that someone tells them to do — and the people who were telling them what to do didn't know what they were doing.

I had been an amateur wrestler since 1952. I had been wrestling professionally since 1967. I was in charge of wrestling at TBS for nine years. I started booking wrestling in 1976 for two of the biggest territories in the country — the Carolinas and Georgia. So I figured I knew something about wrestling — but they didn't want to listen to my ideas. "What the hell do you know?" And yet, the girl I lived with, who never wrestled in her life, was a vice-president of wrestling. The guy I hired in 1983 to deliver tapes to a public TV station became one of the big shots at WCW. The guy

who was a bookkeeper for the company became the President and ran the whole operation. The idea that just anybody could operate professional wrestling didn't turn out to be true, though, because it takes more than just a warm body to make it work. They found that out the hard way.

Wrestling was always a form of entertainment, just like football, hockey, baseball, or whatever. In football, you could just hand off to the fullback, who was William Perry, and gain three to four yards, and you'd win a lot of games. But that's not too exciting. Very little entertainment value. In wrestling, you could just shoot in every match. It's called amateur wrestling. I love it. Lots of people do. And those people that do like it don't all live in Iowa and Oklahoma. But to enjoy amateur wrestling, to be able to appreciate the tremendous effort that goes into amateur wrestling, it helps to have some knowledge of wrestling. But to the average person who doesn't know wrestling, it becomes boring ... quickly. Remember, when you take someone's

money, you'd better send them home happy and excited, and talking about what they saw. What does that sound like? How about professional wrestling?

After 1983, Vince took a totally different approach to promoting professional wrestling. That is to say, different from the way wrestling had been promoted in the past. They were presenting wrestling for the entertainment value. As such, they no longer had to stress wrestling angles. They shifted their focus to soap opera angles. They no longer tell a story based on wrestling. "Let's see — this week, we'll tell the people that my daughter has been screwing Frankenstein." They promote pimps, whores, clowns, monsters, and people grabbing their balls. Every match became a match with the Road Warriors. Everybody was Superman. Nobody could get hurt. If they did get hurt, there was a miraculous and instantaneous recovery.

There was a time when your signature move was

protected. If you used the sleeper hold, nobody else could use it. There are no such restrictions now. If you have a finish move where you come off a 30-foot ladder with a margarita in your hand and a spike strapped to your foot, and you land with the spike piercing your opponents' eye, someone will think, Hey, that got over pretty big. I think I'll try it tonight as a high spot. So the very next night, he drops off a 30-foot ladder with a margarita in his hand and a spike in his foot, and he puts his opponent's eye out. Of course, another difference between the way we did it, and the way they do it now, is that the guy with the spike in his eye now jumps right back up because it's just a little spot in the match.

Today the wrestlers are expected to do things like jump off balconies. That's the kind of stuff Mick Foley was doing the first time I saw him. Mick was a nice kid, but I didn't want to use him. I told him, "If it were up to me, I never would have let you into the business. To me, you are worthless." He had all these goofy ideas, most of

which he thought were great, and to some extent, Vince capitalized on them. The one positive thing I can say for Mick is that he worked pretty hard to do things of which I didn't approve. He thought it was impressive to do a triple somersault and land on a bed of spikes. In some respect, perhaps it is impressive, but what does that have to do with wrestling? Nothing — but that's what wrestling has become.

They also give a lot of thought to their program now. Instead of bookers, they have writers who are supposed to come up with creative and entertaining ideas for their shows.

"Let's see, should we have him come out and grab his balls?"

"No, I think we should have him say, 'Stick it up your ass'."

"Nah, that's too dull. Why don't we just have him say 'Suck it'."

"Kiss my ass is much more descriptive."

They take a vote and the majority decides on 'Suck it'. "Wow! That's a great angle. Let's go with that!" It's just ludicrous.

I'm imagining this, of course, but I'll bet it's close to what really takes place. Watch TV wrestling and let me know what you think looks creative and entertaining.

There are all kinds of differences between my era and today, but the basic differences in that regard are that the wrestlers today don't know how to work a wrestling match or do an interview. Not only that, but there's nobody in control who knows when to tell them whether they're doing something wrong or right. They operate more under the old theory that I talked about earlier — let's do something that the people won't expect.

Now that I think about it, though, I'm not so sure that wouldn't work today. If somebody tried that

in the ring now, they might have people come back who want to see me take a dump in the ring. The mindset has changed so much. Kids are wrestling in their backyards, and jumping off the roof of their house, because that's become the in-thing to do. Who would have ever imagined that? I sure couldn't have predicted it. First of all, I would have thought parents would have enough sense to tell their kids, "Number one, you don't watch that crap that features pimps and whores. And number two, you don't climb up on top of the house and jump off."

Vince's stuff was getting over for a time because everything in society is completely out of whack. The things happening in the wrestling world were a mirror of what was happening in the real world. There is no parental control. The kids are telling their parents to go screw themselves. And, of course, now the problem is that nobody is held responsible for their own actions. Al Gore said there is no controlling legal authority. Bill Clinton says it depends on what the

definition of "is" is.

TBS tried to do the same outlandish things that Vince was doing, but they didn't know how to go about it. They were listening to people who didn't know how to do what Vince was doing. Jim Herd thought he knew how to run things. Jimmy Crockett, Kevin Sullivan, Jimmy Cornette, Ric Flair. They all thought they knew how to do it. In truth, none of them ever did — at least not successfully.

The belief that professional wrestling is fake makes it sound easy. They thought that as long as they admit that everything is all a show, it shouldn't matter who runs it. They all thought that all they had to do was throw any idea, and anybody, into the ring and it was going to work.

I had an analogy involving the movies that I used over and over.

What movie can you point to that is real? Is there

one? No! Let's face it. None of them are real. They're just movies. But by the same token, if you spend eight bucks for a ticket, you want to see a movie that will hold your interest.

Now, stop and think. Are all movies good? Do all movies draw money? No-ooo! Even movies that feature a proven star don't always draw money. On the other hand, movies that don't have any stars sometimes draw money. So what does that tell you? It tells you that there's a certain amount of creativity and understanding needed to be able to produce a movie, with or without a star.

So can anybody make a movie that will be successful at the box office? If movies aren't real, then just like the wrestling business, anybody should be able to make a movie. No. That just isn't so, and everyone knows that. So why wouldn't intelligent people who work for a huge corporation like Turner Broadcasting System, Inc. know that? Why would they think that, because wrestling isn't real, they can put any two

guys out there and make money? After all, the goal of a wrestling company is to make money, isn't it?

One example that floats right off the top of my head is when they gave David Arquette the WCW world heavyweight title. How stupid was that? I just couldn't believe they gave the belt to a 160-pound movie actor. I'm going in circles here, but I always looked at things like that as destroying the value of the title and the credibility of pro wrestling.

Let's go back to our movies analogy. Again, there's nothing true about a movie, but it has to have some rhyme or reason to it. If you pay to see a movie about Hercules, and Hercules turns out to be 160-pound David Arquette, you're going to say, "I know movies are all make-believe, but at the very least, I want to see a guy who actually looks like he could be Hercules."

That's where they screw themselves. They latch onto the idea that everything in wrestling is a

show, so as a result, it doesn't make any difference what they do. I was on the fringe of that position when WCW wanted someone to put short vignettes together that would air before their Pay-Per-Views. The first one I did was with Jake the Snake. Jake did an interview, which I gave him verbatim. Later, we did a skit with Sting in a helicopter. We even did one where we featured a midget with a shark fin strapped to his back, swimming out to attach a bomb to the underside of a boat. We found some footage of a boat exploding and spliced it in. That one got us in hot water — no pun intended. We aired the tape before the pay-per-view and got hit with a raft of crap afterwards. Some people thought we actually blew up a boat.

"That was dangerous!"

"You endangered peoples' lives!"

"The midget might have gotten hurt!"

Anyone with any common sense should have known that what they saw on the film wasn't real. It didn't really happen. The vignettes were usually taped inside a studio and it was obvious that they were all staged. If it was real, how did we just happen to have a camera on a beach at the exact moment a midget planted an explosive device and blew up a boat?

When you look back at those vignettes, you have to think, Jeez, I can't believe Ole Anderson was doing that kind of nonsense.

And you're right. But things were so out of whack by that time, so I was just doing whatever they wanted. As I already said, Bill Watts made that clear when he hired me, and I had no problem with it. He said, "I'm gonna hire you, bring you in as a special referee, and you're gonna do what I tell you to do. Can you work like that?"

I said, "Sure."

Once again, Bill was exhibiting his kind, gentle, and loving ways. He's all heart.

But I think Bill, in his inimitable way, was trying to make The Suits happy. I followed his lead. I did whatever The Suits wanted me to do. I didn't have two words to say about anything. When Bill said, "Here's what I want you to do," that was exactly what I did. The Suits hired me to do the nonsense, so I did the nonsense. At that point, I wasn't giving the orders. I was just taking the orders and carrying them out.

But it didn't make any difference what we did at that point. Everybody had been told that wrestling was a show, so they asked me to come up with some ideas for a show. I didn't necessarily try to conjure up silly ideas, or push things just to see how far I could go. But we were already at the point where nothing we did really mattered, so I just came up with some ridiculous ideas and picked up my two grand a week. Nobody was making any attempt to protect anything at that

point. At least, I wasn't. I gave up. In the back of my mind, though, it still bothered me. In fact, it bothers me yet to this day, and I haven't worked in the business for ten years.

I'll say it again. It didn't matter what we did. Vince McMahon was telling everyone, "The only competition I have is Walt Disney World." He told everybody that wrestling was all fake, scripted, and rehearsed. Were our ideas farfetched? Hell, yes! Were our ideas the shits? Of course! Did The Suits like the ideas? Mm-hmm. As ridiculous as the vignettes were, when they premiered them to company management, The Suits thought they were great. They thought they were outstanding. They all thought the vignettes were great theater. They had the cameras, the cameramen, producers, and directors. They had the elaborate production facilities. They had the expensive lighting. They had everything they needed to make a blockbuster vignette before the Pay-Per-View. The only thing The Suits didn't have was someone who had made

a movie. They had a few people who had acted in movies, but those people had never directed or produced a movie. The actors don't make movies. They just take instructions. "Okay, it's your turn. You say this, you say that, then step off camera." The actors need someone to give them directions. WCW didn't have those directors. They only had people who watched movies.

I'm sure a lot of the people at WCW had seen wrestling on TV, but they didn't have any idea about what it took to make it work. They didn't understand the logistics that made it work. I've seen rockets lift off and fly to the moon. I can watch them do that every day for a year. Does than mean I qualify to head the space shuttle program? I'm sure you've seen a lot of construction workers build houses in your neighborhood. Can you do that? I used to joke about that, too. I would tell Herd, "I'm going to be a medical doctor when I quit wrestling."

Jim would ask, "How can you do that?"

"I watch General Hospital every day," I answered.

That's all the people at TBS had ever done. They watched wrestling, but they didn't have any idea of what it took to put it all together. When they were put in charge, what did they do? They just imitated some of the things they had seen in the past. If they remembered me hitting a guy over the head with a chair, they thought, That's what we need to do to draw money. What they didn't understand was, the fact that I hit someone over the head with a chair had nothing to do with the business. I hit the guy over the head with a chair because I had just found out that he had stolen my car, ran over my dog, screwed my wife, punched one of my kids, and pushed my grandmother out of her wheelchair. That all led to me finally getting so fed up that I whacked him over the head with a chair. All they knew was that I hit someone over the head with a chair, so that's what they

did. Unfortunately, they had no reason for doing that. As a result, there was no reaction from the people watching. The fans were all asking each other, "Why did he hit that guy with the chair?"

Then somebody in management wonders, "Well, geez. Why didn't that work? I saw Ole do it twenty years ago and it really got over. It drew a lot of money. It must have been different back then. Oh, I almost forgot. Now it's the nineties." Again, it's all predicated on the idea that somebody is making the general assumption, "Well, if wrestling is fake, how hard can it be."

The same things apply to the wrestlers, too. A lot of the guys just didn't understand the business well enough to know how to get heat from the people. For instance, one guy thought he got heat because he yelled at a fat woman who was sitting in the front row. "Hey, fat ass. You have more chins than the Hong Kong phone book!" As soon as he walked into the dressing room, he started bragging to all the guys, "Boy, I really got a lot of

heat with that insult."

I said, "What the hell are you talking about? That one woman might have been mad, but it didn't do anything for the rest of the audience, and it didn't have anything to do with the way you wrestled."

Or someone might say, "I pulled the shirt off a fan and called him a jerk. Boy, I really got a lot of heat with that guy."

"Yeah, you did. Well, if that guy buys 10,000 tickets next week, you're in business."

Sure, if you take someone's firstborn and smash it against the ring post, I guess they would be mad at you, but do you call that heat? No! Heat is what you get from what you do to your opponent. And by that, I don't mean smashing him in the head, either. That's what we called cheap heat. A lot of guys never could understand that.

We did so many different things through the years, but we had to watch things on a day-by-day basis

to see how the people were reacting. That's why you have to work in front of people every day. I think daily is the key. Five times a day would be even better, but if you're not in front of people at least on a daily basis, like we were, you can't get a handle on what works and what doesn't. How are you ever going to learn? Granted, some of the guys who were in front of people on a daily basis still didn't learn. They did enough to get by, but they never really learned the mechanics or understood the motivation behind the things they did.

I remember Steve Austin coming to me when he first went to work for WCW in 1989. When we first met, he thought I could teach him something about wrestling, so he asked me, "Would you help me learn to wrestle?" It wasn't more than a month or two before he didn't come around anymore. He didn't need to. He was a star. Brian Pillman wanted me to help him. I had a lot of guys ask me for help when they were getting started, but every one of those guys, within a month or two of being at TBS, said, "The hell with this." It took no time

at all before they considered me to be really old school. Why did they need to know anything about working, about wrestling, about psychology, or about drawing money? Why did they need to know any of the things that once made wrestling a success? They were getting a paycheck. They were getting what the stars called "mailbox money."

They didn't have to do anything except show up for work, and that was only when they felt like it. At least Vince's people had to do a little something. They had to be able to read the teleprompter so they knew what to say on their interview. And they must have gone over the matches to some degree, even though they were horrendous.

I knew how to correct things, but they weren't going to listen to me. They would take their opinions to the extreme, "Well, we can't be laying in a hold all night long." I never talked about laying in a hold. Dusty Rhodes never laid in a

hold. The Sheik, Bill Watts, Dory Funk, Andre the Giant, Haystack Calhoun — none of them laid in a hold, so who were they talking about? There was just no way to get through to them because they would characterize everything as "the old school."

In my opinion, pro wrestling has always been based on emotion, and emotion never changes. People are instilled at birth with identical emotions. I don't care if you were born in 1925 or 4,000 years ago. People have always tried to screw their neighbors' wife, or steal their neighbors' cow. The emotions that result from those actions are eternal with people. They don't change. The only difference today is, instead of being stabbed with a spear, you get cut to ribbons by an AK47. I could never convince anybody at TBS of that because they thought the wrestling business had evolved. After all, this is the new Millennium. The truth is, the business only changed because the people in charge didn't know what they were doing.

You can use the movies to make yet another analogy. There are many different emotions that you experience when you go to the movies. You cheer out loud at the end of some movies, yet at others, you want to cry. Every so often, you'll wonder why you didn't get up and leave 20 minutes into the stinker. Wrestling evokes the same emotions. In some cases, we want people to cheer and be happy. We want them to go home and tell everybody what an enjoyable night they had. On other nights, you want them to go home and say, "I know murder is illegal, but if I ever see that SOB on the street, I'll run him over." That's why I got stabbed so many times. Somebody had to have emotions to risk a jail sentence, let alone take the chance of killing me. Why would they do that? They had to be so caught up in their emotions that anything that made any sense was completely driven out of their mind. You don't see anybody who can elicit emotions like that today.

"Ha-ha-ha! He got thrown onto a table. The table broke and he broke his back and he's

paralyzed for life. God, that was a good one! Okay, what's next?"

Owen Hart was killed when he fell 50-feet from the rafters to the mat at the Kemper Arena in Kansas City. Everybody thought it was part of the show.

"When is he going to get up?"

"He's been there long enough. Why isn't he getting up and beating the hell out of somebody?"

"Oh, it was an accident. That's terrible. Who's wrestling next?"

None of the wrestlers who came into the business in the last 20 years have had the opportunity to get that regular, nightly experience in front of people. They're painting by the numbers. They just go through the motions, without knowing what to do.

I don't know how anybody could possibly

continue to watch something which they know, without question, is put on. You can say that a lot of what we did was put on, but when you get right down to it, there was always one match that made the people say, "Geez, that one didn't look fake," or "I know that one wasn't fake." I used to have people come up to me and say, "Those other matches might have been bullshit, but when we watched you guys, we knew you were really wrestling." Were they just telling me that because they thought I wanted to hear that? Yeah, maybe they were, but by the same token, there must have been that little bit of doubt in their mind. They weren't quite sure. And the fans kept coming back.

I keep referring to Dory Funk Jr. versus Jack Brisco, or Verne Gagne and just about anyone, but with Jack and Dory, you won't find a better example of a great wrestling match. The odd thing about it was, there was no punching, no kicking, no hair pulling, and no eye gouging. They weren't ripping at each others' face. They were wrestling. Would that work today? No. Why

wouldn't it work today? Because nobody knows how to do it. That's the bottom line. It wouldn't work because the promoters don't have anybody capable of having a match like Dory and Jack had. Sure, I've heard people say, "I can go out there and wrestle."

"No, you can't! You don't know how."

"Sure I do. I just go out and get a hold."

No, no, no. There's more to it than that. You have to be able to get a feel for the audience reaction and see how things are going. That's what I used to tell Dallas Page. He always had to have a match that was laid out. He could spend four hours going over a five-minute match. He had to know where his opponent was going to put his foot, where he was going to put his own foot, where his opponent was going to put his arm, where he was going to put his own arm. Back and forth, back and forth. I said, "Okay, what happens if a fight breaks out in the third row? The people

are no longer paying any attention to you. They're going crazy because two fans are fighting tooth-and-nail. Do you just keep on going through the sequence with your right hand, then your left hand, then your left foot? Do you ignore what's going on in the stands? What do you do if there's a fire in the building? What happens if the ring breaks? What do you do if the referee gets knocked out? What happens if your opponent breaks his leg?" I went on and on and on with different scenarios. Dallas didn't have an answer. If any of those things happened, he would be screwed because he didn't know how to actually work. But on the other hand, even if those things didn't happen, he was still screwed, because his matches were the shits. There's one consolation. Dallas wasn't alone. He had lots of company. The rest of the card, in fact.

Chapter 52
Nothing New under the Sun

Vince McMahon didn't create anything new when he took professional wrestling nationwide. It wasn't the beginning of wrestling when Vince took over. Vince just changed the definition of professional wrestling. He swerved everyone into thinking that New York had created something brand new, as well as reviving something that was dead. The truth is, his business got over because it was a natural extension of a business that had been thriving for years. It would be difficult to name a place where wrestling wasn't doing extremely well in the '50s, '60s and '70s. Wrestling was tremendously successful for Vince's father, and for Verne Gagne, Roy Shire, Don Owen, Bill Watts, Jim Crockett, Eddie Graham, and countless other

promoters. What territory wasn't making a lot of money in the '70s? You could go to just about any territory during those years and find wrestling doing big business.

In 1971, there wasn't a town in Florida where Eddie Graham wasn't successful. We were selling out Tampa, St. Petersburg, Jacksonville, Miami, and doing big business in the other towns. Verne was packing the arenas in Minneapolis, Winnipeg, Denver, and San Francisco. Charlotte, Greensboro, Winston-Salem, Richmond, and Greenville were all selling out for the Crocketts. Promoters were doing big business in most of the other major cities, including Houston, Dallas, Memphis, Nashville, Los Angeles, Tulsa, New Orleans, Portland, and Kansas City. The business was rolling along like a juggernaut, just as it had been doing for years.

Look at the records and see how many towns were running on a nightly basis 30 years ago. Let's look at Georgia as an example, because

that's the one I'm the most familiar with. In Georgia alone, when I was booking, GCW had as many as three towns running every night. We had shows in Columbus, Atlanta, Marietta, Macon, Augusta, Rome, Albany, Carrollton, Griffin ... every week, 52 weeks a year. On top of that, when Ann Gunkel was running opposition to us, she promoted as many as two towns a night. That's five towns almost every night that promoted pro wrestling in Georgia alone, and we were both doing big business in Atlanta — every week.

But remember, that was just in Georgia. The Carolinas usually ran three towns a night. Florida had at least two towns. Oklahoma had more than two or three because Leroy McGuirk and Bill Watts were promoting against each other. Texas had four promoters — Paul Boesch, Fritz von Erich, Dory Funk Sr., and Joe Blanchard — so how many towns were running in that state? California had Mike LeBell in Los Angeles and Roy Shire in San Francisco. There were more than 30 wrestling offices in the National Wrestling

Alliance alone, each running at least six cities every week. Many of them ran shows in at least fifteen cities every week. Not all of them were a huge success, but they all did big business and had been around for many years.

Most people are shocked when I describe attendance figures for pro wrestling shows in the '60s, '70s, and early '80s. You can't use box office figures to compare wrestling today to that of yesterday. Inflation has changed box office prices so much that it's almost impossible to use them as a standard for comparison. For instance, how much did a gallon of milk cost 30 years ago? Instead, you have to compare the number of people who bought tickets. That will give you a true picture of the business. If you compare attendance figures with attendance figures, you're going to discover that there were millions of people going to pro wrestling matches every month. You won't find millions attending now.

For instance, when Columbus, Georgia, was

drawing 5,000 people, the gate might have only been $15,000, but it was still 5,000 people — and that was week after week after week. Do you think Vince McMahon could run Columbus week after week after week and draw 5,000 people? No! They go there once a year and draw 5,000 people. Let me rephrase that. They might draw 5,000 people. The WWF only ran Columbus twice in the past two years and drew crowds of 4,936 and 2,500 [February 4, 2001 and June 9, 2002].

If you insist on talking about box office figures, just multiply the number of people times the average ticket price. In the mid-'70s, ringside tickets might have made it to $4, but our average was probably around $3 because we were putting 5,000 people in the building and doing $15,000 houses on a consistent basis. Augusta and Macon were both routinely doing $8,000 to $12,000, sometimes more.

In the '90s, I actually had people brag to me about

how much money they drew. "You guys never did more than $15,000 in Columbus," they boasted. "We just did $50,000." That's impressive for one show in Columbus. Sure, we only did $10,000 to $15,000 — but we did $10,000 to $15,000 every single week. 52 weeks a year! If you base your calculations on the lower figure of $10,000, that's a total of $520,000 for the year.

Let's assume the WWF did a total of $200,000 for their last two shows in Columbus, Georgia. Who did more? I know it's been a long time since most of you were in school, but here's a basic math question for everybody.

Which is more?

a. $200,000

b. $520,000

c. Both

d. Neither. They are the same.

Before any of you ask — no, the answer is not in the back of the book. If you get stumped by the question, call one of your friends and have them explain it to you. Please don't call Jim Herd. He won't understand the question.

That's like saying that Henry Ford must have been a poor salesman and sold a rotten product because he only made one car in 1908. Not only that, but he could only get people to pay $850 for a car. Fords must be better now because they're selling millions of cars each year and getting $40,000 per car. Sure, they're selling more cars now and getting more for them, but in case you haven't noticed, inflation has increased the price of the cars, and the population in this country has increased by almost 200 million since 1908, so are they really doing any better?

If you look back at other cities, you can find comparable figures across the board. When I came

to Atlanta in 1974, Atlanta was a city of 600,000 people. Ticket sales ran $20,000 to $25,000 every week, except when we went to the Omni, once a month, where tickets sale totals ranged from $35,000 to more than $45,000. If you add those figures up, along with all the other shows we ran on a regular basis, we had a $5 million territory. That was with an average ticket price of less than three dollars. If we charged what Turner and Vince charged in the '90s, when ticket prices increased dramatically, we would have had a gross business of $35 million.

Since Vince bought the major interest in Georgia Championship Wrestling, I doubt he could claim to have done $5 million in Georgia in any given year. I doubt if WCW could make that claim,either, even with the higher ticket prices they were charging. They were no longer selling three dollar and five dollar tickets. WCW may have run a few shows in Georgia that grossed as much as $100,000, but they were charging twelve bucks and more a seat.

We made money everywhere we went. Jimmy Crockett did big business when we went to places like Buffalo and Toronto. I never could understand why people were so impressed when Vince sold out a show at Madison Square Garden once a month. I used to joke, "If they just open the doors to Madison Square Garden in New York, you would probably have 20,000 people wander in just looking for a place to take a leak." When you have eight million people in a city, what does it take to get 20,000 people to walk into your building once a month? That's no big deal. We were running towns every week, not once a month, in cities much smaller than New York, and drawing big crowds.

Years ago, running a wrestling company was just as tough as it is today. It really was a job to be able to figure out what to do, how to do it, and be able to make money at it. When I got into the business, making money was the criteria by which you were measured. Unfortunately, I doubt you will ever see 16,000 people attending the wrestling matches at the Omni once a month in

Atlanta again. Or 7,000 people attending the Atlanta City Auditorium every week on the other three weeks. I doubt you'll see the St. Petersburg Bayfront Center filled to capacity on a monthly basis. You'll never see the San Francisco Cow Palace turn away people, even on a three-week basis. Name the arena — the Greensboro Coliseum, the Minneapolis Auditorium, the Los Angeles Olympic Auditorium — they'll never be able to match the numbers of fans attending wrestling matches in the past.

That's why Lou Thesz and I wholeheartedly disagree with people who talk about the renaissance of wrestling being brought about by Vince McMahon in the 1980s. That's a load of bull. Vince stepped into a ready-made deal. He had an established audience and he milked that audience for every cent he could get out of them. He took a business that was running like a racehorse and turned it into an old mare that was only strong enough to pull an ice cream wagon. Then he put a bunch of midgets on the

horse's back and had naked broads dancing in front of the horse.

Vince took a business that was already successful, a business which he had absolutely nothing to do with as far as its success goes, and presented that successful business to TV people all over the country. Since he was from New York, those people listened to him.

In early '83, Ralph Freed and I were called to attend a meeting and luncheon with Bob Wussler, an executive at TBS. At the time, Ralph was promoting the southern half of Georgia. Wussler wanted to know if we were financially capable of operating a wrestling organization. He wanted a financial statement, or other evidence of our financial stability. Ralph and I weren't about to give anybody a financial statement. We thought the fact that we had been providing a wrestling program for TBS for the last ten years should be proof enough of our ability to operate television successfully.

Like the smart-ass I was (and still am), I stupidly made a comment along the lines of, "At least I didn't spend $1.5 billion on a bunch of old movies." If you look carefully at my left leg, you can still see the scar where Ralph kicked me.

The $1.5 billion was a reference to what Ted Turner paid Kirk Kerkorian for the MGM film library in 1986. There was more than a few people at TBS who thought Ted had paid too much for "a bunch of old movies." People weren't too sure about it at the time, and neither was I, but in retrospect, it looks like Ted made a brilliant decision. Fifteen years after the deal, people are watching those old movies over and over. That's why Ted Turner was the CEO of TBS, while everybody else just worked there. I never gave Ted a whole lot of credit for things, but I do know he was one of those guys who had some kind of an intuitive instinct about business decisions. At times, he was a gambler.

It was a mistake on my part to make light of the

$1.5 billion deal. In fact, it was stupid on my part, but that was one of those times when I was guilty of being stupid. There have been other times, as well ... but, back to the luncheon.

I thought we could make Atlanta the Mecca of wrestling, so I reminded Wussler that TBS was the most powerful television station on earth. TBS was broadcast all over the world and it was gaining more viewers every day. He agreed, but he also gave me the impression that people looked at Atlanta as a small, southern town. He used the word provincial. On the other hand, he loved New York.

That reminded me of an article I once read about a project given to a group of elementary school children in New York. The kids were asked to draw a picture of the United States and pinpoint New York City on the picture. When the kids drew their picture, New York City made up something like 80 percent of the total picture. A lot of adults think that way, too, and they don't all

live in New York. I was talking to an adult who thought that way.

I only remember one other significant thing about that day. After being questioned about my finances, I got stuck with the tab for lunch. I was overjoyed.

The people that I talked to told me that when Vince went to the television stations, he went in with a flourish and a fanfare. He brought a few of his big name wrestlers with him and some of his front office people. He offered more money to television stations than they had ever been paid before. Vince locked up the stations and arenas with exclusives, effectively locking other promotions out. It wasn't too long before almost every major promoter in the United States was out of business.

When I met with Wussler in Atlanta, all I did was pay for his lunch. When Vince met him in New York, Vince probably had a limousine meet

Wussler at the airport and put him up in a fancy hotel. I didn't put him up in a hotel. If I had, I would have dropped him off at a Motel 6 and told him to pay for it. We weren't in a position to spend money foolishly and I didn't think we had to. We thought The Suits would appreciate the fact that we had a business that was making money for us and for them. They didn't appreciate that. Instead, they fell for Vince's pitch. The Suits were conned into thinking that Vince was the guru of the wrestling world. Once again, the New York mystique held sway and they took Vince's bait — hook, line and sinker.

I don't think Vince is a great manipulator, but he has had his moments. I give him credit for knowing enough to surround himself with some talented people — people like Pat Patterson, Bob Remus, and Jack Lanza. I suspect some of them were a lot smarter about the business than Vince was. At times, those people would try to steer Vince back toward wrestling. To whatever extent, they were occasionally successful, but Vince also

realized that if he could set off sparklers, lights, and fireworks, present a lot of music and noise, and create a myriad of flashy costumes and characters, then someone would buy it. Maybe so.

I do give Vince credit for doing something that was unique. I never liked it, but it worked for him. They no longer had 50 towns running throughout the country on any given night. Since they were running only one or two towns a night, the people would wait for months and months, anxious for the WWF to return. When a show finally came to town, it had all kinds of hoopla behind it. It was no longer just wrestling. It was now an event.

Vince made other changes. In the "old days," the people in the arena sat in the dark. The only lights left on in the arena were the lights over the ring. The emphasis was on the match. Surprised? In contrast to that, Vince had the lights on the audience. The cameras would pan the crowd, so the people would get excited about

the possibility of seeing themselves or their friends on TV. They could dress up like their favorite wrestler. They could bring a sign to the arena. If you stood up and gave someone the finger, all your friends at home could see you. If you wanted to call a wrestler a "no-good so-and-so," you could, and everybody knew who was doing it. Today, swearing at the wrestlers has become a national pastime.

To show you how much things have changed — I was in Augusta, Georgia, in 1974. I took the ring microphone and said, "Dammit! Gene and I will be back!" As soon as I walked into the dressing room, I was placed under arrest for swearing. When I protested, a second charge was placed against me — resisting arrest.

Of course, that kind of thing has become totally acceptable during the past decade. If someone yells out an obscenity, the cops don't walk over and tell them to sit down, which they used to do. Today, the cops don't say anything. Years

ago, the fans themselves used to complain. "Make that goof sit down! Why don't they escort him out of here? I bought a ticket and I want to see the matches. I don't want that idiot standing up in front of me and waving his sign." Today, the people encourage the guy to continue his tirade. The screaming, yelling, obscenities, and the middle fingers all became a part of the new wrestling program.

That had never happened before. It was probably a unique idea and one that appealed to the fans because now they could be seen on television. They could record the show on their VCR while they were at the show. When they got home, they could play the tape to see if they appeared on camera. They could show their friends, "Hey, look! I'm on TV. I'm a star!" And to some extent, they were ... or at least, as much of a star as most of the wrestlers.

In fact, at times, the fans were bigger stars than the guys in the ring ... which isn't saying much.

Since the early days of pro wrestling, the show was all about the wrestlers, and what the wrestlers were doing in the ring. Now the focus has shifted to what goes on in the dressing room, the men's room, outside the ring, outside the building — anywhere but in the ring. In fact, the wrestlers spend less time in the ring than they do anywhere else. When they are in the ring, they stack tables up and slam their opponents through them. How stupid is that? Actually, it's not stupid. It's called wrestling. It's the new Millennium.

To some degree, Vince's new ideas worked, and to some degree, they're still working. But as time goes by, the people are getting tired of the hoopla. They're bored with the half-naked broads and the midgets. Not only that, but what happened to the people who bought tickets every week for years? And how many people more than 25 years old do you see going to the wrestling matches now? We used to have thousands of adults attend every week. A majority of the crowd today is made up of kids, many of whom are wrestler

wannabees.

Vince is now the only person in the whole country who is promoting wrestling nationally, and he's now facing a situation where he has steadily diminishing returns. Twenty years ago, when the pro wrestling business began to change, I predicted that it wouldn't last. Well, I was wrong. Vince is still in business. Will pro wrestling be around 20 years from now? I don't have any idea, but from what I understand, the ratings continue to drop. In the late '90s, Vince was getting ratings above 6.0 for his Raw Is War television program. WCW maintained an average around 4.5 points. When Vince bought both WCW and ECW, I'm sure he convinced the television executives that he could combine all three promotions and increase the ratings. The truth is, the numbers have dropped. In 2003, they have been averaging somewhere around 3.8 on Raw, which is their main show — and that's without competition. Unless things have changed since this book went to press, his numbers continue to drop steadily, even with Turner out of

the picture. If you were the only shoemaker in the world, you should sell a lot of shoes. Right now, there is only one major wrestling company in this country. Are they selling wrestling? Are more people coming to watch their shows? You tell me.

Will the wrestling business end up in the toilet? I think so. If it does, it will be because they aren't giving the people anything they want to see. The wrestlers, bookers, and promoters who made the business work for years and years aren't being consulted. They wouldn't be hired by today's management. On top of that, many of them are literally dead or dying — and there is no one to take their place.

If I walked into the TBS offices right now and said, "I told you so," they still couldn't understand what I was talking about. They thought the only thing really necessary to make wrestling work was to go through the motions and have people available to fill executive positions. I wonder what Ted Turner would say if he really understood

how much of his money The Suits had thrown away. I doubt wrestling was the only department in his company that was losing money, but I never understood why they continued to let that happen for so many years.

The Suits at TBS wouldn't accept the suggestion that it takes more than just having people who wear tights and fancy costumes. It takes more than just setting off fireworks. At one time, the people at TBS told me that Ted made the comment that wrestling put his little channel 17 on the map. But that all changed, and The Suits never understood that — and now they never will. The fact that they lost the whole shooting match still hasn't registered with the people at TBS yet. When they shut WCW down, The Suits at TBS still thought Hulk Hogan, Ric Flair, and Bill Goldberg were the greatest talents that ever appeared in a wrestling ring. With The Suits in charge, wrestling at TBS lost tens of millions of dollars. It still never seemed to affect their perception of the wrestling business. The fact that people quit watching WCW

never seemed to matter. The fact that AOL shut them down didn't seem to matter.

One of The Suits at TBS summed it up for me shortly after World Championship Wrestling closed its doors. These were his exact words. "The people in the audience were just dumb bastards who didn't know a good show when they saw one."

That was, and is, the mindset of a lot of the people who ran World Championship Wrestling at TBS — a multi-million-dollar wrestling business — and I would guess that a lot of those same people, or people just like them, are still running Turner Broadcasting Systems.

Chapter 53
The Finish

Regardless of your opinion, this book is about my opinion. If you think I've been blowing smoke up my own ass — there's no question about it. I am blowing smoke up my own ass. You can read this book and look at it in several different ways. You can say that I'm full of crap, or that I'm lying, or that I'm making everything sound different than it really was. You can read the drivel the Internet and dirt sheet experts write about wrestling in the "old days." However, I suggest that you take a look at the facts in order to come up with a conclusion. These are the facts.

A lot of the people who worked for me will probably tell you that I was a bad-tempered bastard who was hard to get along with. However, many of those same people will also have to admit that everybody made money when I was

booking. Talk to the guys who wrestled in Georgia. Some of those guys were making as much as $100,000 a year — in the little, backwoods, provincial Georgia territory.

There were also many bookers who tried to make a go of it in Georgia, yet none of them lasted very long. I worked in that capacity for almost ten years. Louie Tillet was Jim Barnett's first booker. In the space of three years, Harley Race replaced Louie, then Tom Renesto replaced Harley. Tom had the book for two of those three years, the longest of any other booker, myself excluded. I booked the territory for the next three years, and we did consistent business the entire time. Go back and look at the figures.

After I quit on the first day of 1980, Barnett eventually hired Bill Watts. Barnett hired me back in May 1980 and I stayed until November, at which time I quit when Barnett hired Robert Fuller to be my assistant. Robert lasted longer than either Tillet and Harley. He made it to his four-month

anniversary before getting canned.

Next up to bat was George Scott. He held on for six months. Who did Barnett hire to take his place?

Me. Not only that, but Jimmy Crockett later fired George and hired me to take his place in the Carolinas.

If Georgia had been such an easy territory to book, it seems funny that Barnett went through so many bookers. And yet, the only booker he never fired was me. I always quit. And every time he let one of his other bookers go, he called me back. "Ole, we need you. Can you come back?"

Barnett used to tell people, "Ole is very difficult, but we are making money." And we were. Everybody was. In 1977, most of the house shows were sellouts. We ran the Omni two weeks in a row. That had never been done before. Most people don't realize what an accomplishment that

was. You have to remember that the only advertising the Omni got was on the Saturday before the Sunday show, so there were no advance sales. The shows at the Omni were all walk-up business. The people were watching TV at six o'clock on Saturday evening to learn that wrestling would be at the Omni on the following night.

In addition, from 1981 to 1983, I was booking two territories — Charlotte and Atlanta. I had more than a hundred wrestlers working for me. On top of that, we were running Buffalo, Baltimore, Michigan, Toronto, Ohio, and West Virginia. I'm blowing my own horn again, but of all the guys who booked, I don't think anybody ever ran a territory that large — ever! Nobody booked as many towns as I booked at any one particular time. There were other people who booked all over the country, but it was a hit-or-miss proposition. Nobody promoted as many towns on a weekly basis, either. Vince is promoting all over the world, but again, not on a weekly basis and not four to six towns a night. The WWE ends their

shows by telling the people, "We're glad you were here tonight. We'll be back to see you again in 2004." Well, maybe ... maybe not. I wouldn't bet on 2006.

If I had the opportunity to do it all over, I would go out of my way to be more friendly toward some of The Suits. I would spend my weekends washing Ted Turner's cars, mowing his lawn, and pulling weeds out of his garden. I didn't do any of those things because I mistakenly thought I would be judged by how much money I helped the company make.

The one important thing I would have done was get a law firm that interpreted the bylaws of Georgia Championship Wrestling the way the judge and I did. When I read them, I was so certain that I was right. I consulted two law firms and they both told me that I didn't know what I was talking about. Not having the experience to know that a lot of Georgia attorneys, especially the ones that I had, are stupid, not to mention thieves, and

thinking that they were the all-knowing experts in the field of law that they claimed to be, I finally had to conclude that they knew what they were talking about, and that I was wrong.

But I was right. Of course. What else? Knowing me, could I ever be wrong?

Of course, Vince did exactly what I was afraid he could do. What he did was legal. He could do it — and he did do it. He took control of Georgia Championship Wrestling.

If I had that to do over again, that would have never happened. I would have changed the bylaws so nobody would have been able to take control of the company in any way, shape or form. But, at that time ....

It was really tough to hang up the tights because that was all I had ever done. When I was booking two territories and manipulating more than a hundred wrestlers, I was under a tremendous

amount of stress, but I loved every minute of it..

Today, I enjoy life and I workout at the gym just about every day. The funny thing is, as you get older, things just aren't the same. You look back and wonder where the years have gone. One person I talk to quite often is Verne Gagne. We haven't been on the mat for years, since I first started about 36 years ago. Hell, Verne is only 77 or 78 years old. He's just a kid. But if he asked me to get on the mat, I'm gonna take Nancy Reagan's advice. I'll just say no. From time to time, when I'm talking to Verne, I'll start telling him some bullshit story. Before I get into it too far, I'll ask him if he's heard it before. In the last few years, he always replies, "What's the difference. I can't remember what happened last week. It's all new to me."

Wow. As I said before, things just aren't the same when you get older.

Epilogue

My dad used to display my publicity pictures on the back bar in his beer joint. One picture in particular was of Joe Louis and me. One day in 1970, I walked into my dad's place and noticed two men standing at the bar with their backs toward me. They were looking at the pictures and asking my dad about them.

As I got closer, I recognized the two guys. Eighteen years had gone by, but I never forgot the bastards.

Ken and Bill — the two guys who had intimidated me when I was ten years old.

They still weighed about 150 pounds apiece. As far as I was concerned, they hadn't changed. They were midgets. But by that time, there was a big change in me. I weighed 275 pounds. I wasn't a midget.

I recognized them, but they didn't know me from Adam. They didn't know me as Ole Anderson, or for that matter, by any other name. "Do you know who I am?" I asked.

"Oh, yeah. You're the guy in the pictures."

I asked them again. "No, no, no. Forget the pictures. Do you know who I am?"

They shook their heads no. "Think back about eighteen years ago. Now do you know who I am?"

They stood there like two idiots, shaking their heads from side to side. They still didn't have any idea. I forged on. "Do you remember a 10-year-old kid delivering papers that you used to fuck with every Sunday morning?" A look of comprehension finally appeared on their faces.

"That was me," I enlightened them. "I just wanna know one thing. Do you two assholes want to fuck with me now?"

Ken and Bill put their beer glasses down on the bar, turned around, and walked out.

"That's not too good for business," my dad muttered. "I hope there aren't too many more people who gave you a bad time when you were ten."

THE END

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